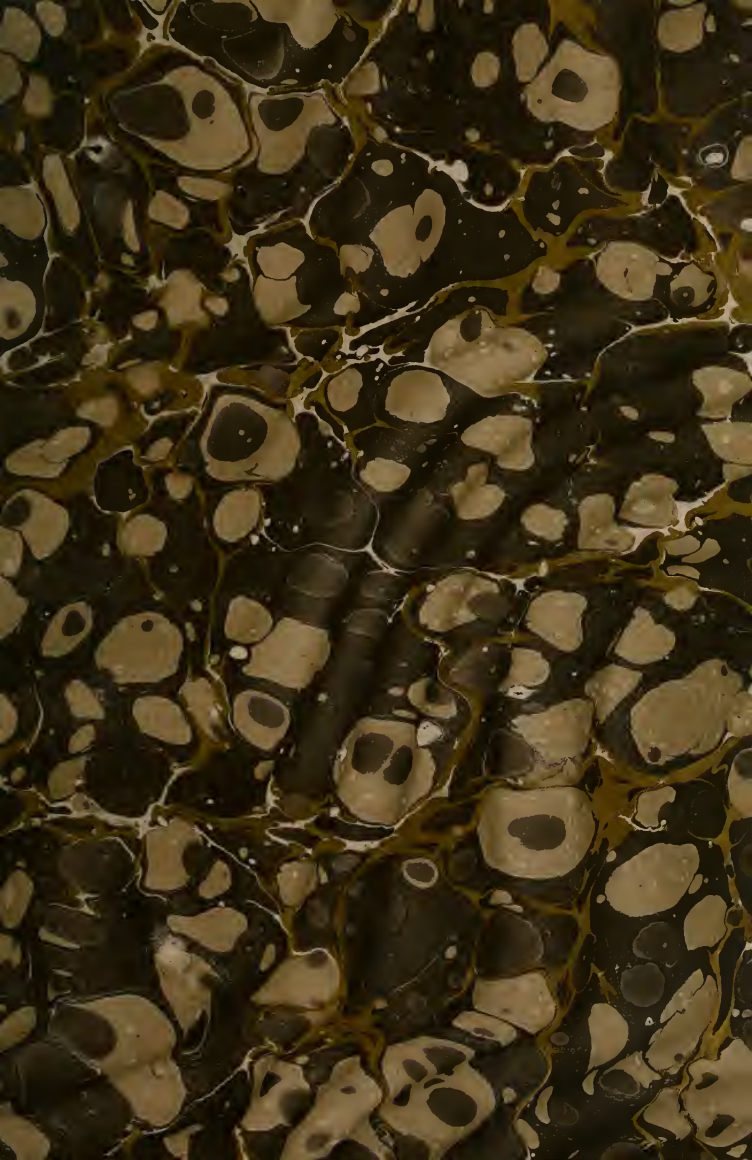
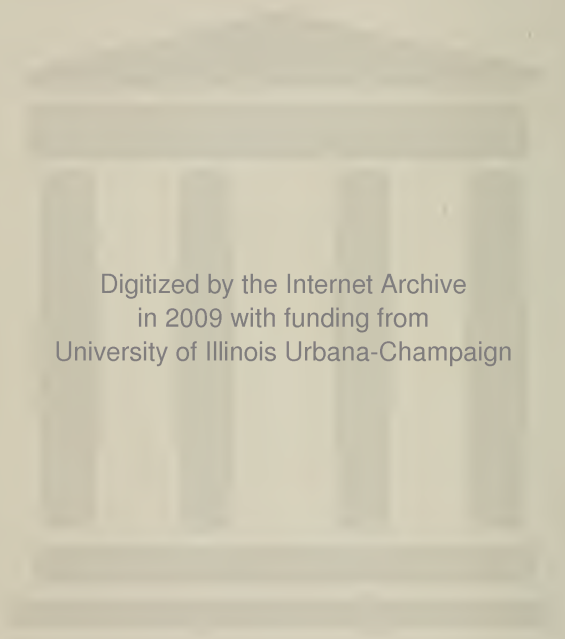


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HARRY MUIR:

A STORY OF SCOTTISH LIFE.

BY

THE AUTHOR

OF "MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND," "MERKLAND," ETC.

THREE VOLUMES IN ONE.

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HARRY MUIR.

CHAPTER I

"Housekeeping youth have ever homely wits."

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

"AND this is the pillar that Rob Roy hid behind, the Sabbath day that he warned the young English gentleman in the kirk. It's the very place itsel. Here was the pulpit—and the seats were a' here, and this is the pillar that hid Rob Roy."

A party of young men were in the crypt of Glasgow cathedral—the little sleek, humble-looking man, who very unobtrusively acted as Cicerone, was pointing out to them the notability, with these words.

One of the visitors turned away with a grave smile, and leaving his companions, began to wander slowly down one of the long black aisles. The dim withdrawing vistas—the pillars with their floral chaplets—the singular grace and majesty of those dark and ponderous arches—impressed him with very different associations. The young man's smile, slightly scornful at first, melted as he reached the lower end, and looking up through this grand avenue, saw the little knot of dim figures in the distance. He was glad to escape from their laughter, and unsuitable merriment. These noble old cloisters were too grave and solemn, to have their stillness so invaded.

But he was not suffered long to remain uninterrupted in his contemplative mood. "What ails Cuthbert?" said one of the younger of the party, a lad in the transition state be-

tween boy and man. "See to him down yonder at the very end, like a crow in the mist—I say, Cuthbert!"

As the piping shrill voice called out his name at its highest pitch, the young man began slowly to advance again. The lad came forward to meet him. "What are you smiling at—what did you go away for?"

"I was smiling at myself, John," answered the accused.

John was curious. "What for?"

"For thinking there were things more interesting here, than the pillar that hid Rob Roy. Come along—never mind. Where are they all bound for, now?"

They were bound for a very dissimilar place—no other than the crowded Broomielaw, where John's brothers were bent upon showing their Edinburgh cousin, Cuthbert Charteris, and an English stranger who accompanied them, one or two fine ships belonging to "the house" then in port. These young men were the sons of a prosperous merchant, all of them already in harness in the office, and beginning to make private ventures on their own behalf. There were three of them—Richard, Alick, and John Buchanan; the two elder had reached the full dignity of young manhood, and rejoiced in mighty whiskers, which John, poor fellow, could only covet intensely, and cultivate with all his might; but even John had begun to have the shrewd man of business engrafted on the boy, and was sometimes precociously calculating, and commercial—sometimes disagreeably swaggering and loud—though not unfrequently simple, foolish, and generous, as better became his years.

"I say, Cuthbert," said the communicative John, as he swung his arm through his grave cousin's, and followed his gay brothers on the way to the river, "did you ever see Harry Muir? Dick says he's going to make him come and dine with us to-night."

"And who is Harry Muir?" asked Charteris.

"Oh, he's nobody—only a clerk in the office you know—but you never saw such a clever chap. He can sing anything you like. He's a grand singer. And when Harry's in a good humour, you should just hear him with the fellows in the office. My father looks out of his own room sometimes to see what's the row, and there's Gilchrist sucking his pen, and Macauley and Alick close down over their books, writing for a race, and Muir quite cool, and looking as innocent as can be. You should just see them, and see how puzzled my father is, when he finds that there's no row at all!"

"And in such emergencies, how do you behave yourself, Johnnie?"

"Johnnie! I wish you'd just mind that I'm not a boy now."

"Jack, then! Will that please you, young man," said Charteris, smiling.

"Me? I behave the best way I can," said the mollified John. "The best plan is, to set to working, and never let on that you hear the door open; but we like to get him among a lot of us when there's nobody in the way; and you'll just see to-night, Cuthbert, what a grand fellow he is for fun."

Cuthbert did not look very much delighted. "And when is this famous dinner to be?" he asked. "Is Dick to entertain us at home?"

Master John burst into a great laugh. "Man, Cuthbert, what a simple fellow you are! You don't think my mother would ask Harry Muir to dine."

"And why not, my boy?" asked the Edinburgh advocate.

"Why not! Man, is that the way you do in the east country? He's only a clerk, and everybody knows you Edinburgh folk are as proud as proud can be. Would you ask your clerk to dine with you?"

"I don't possess such an appendage, Sir John," said the briefless barrister, "except it be a little scrubby boy like what you were the last time I was west here—and he certainly would need some brushing up. So he's not a gentleman, this wit of yours? He would not be presentable in the drawing-room?"

"Hum! I don't know," said honest John, hesitating. "He looks quite as well as Dick or Alick, or that Liverpool man there." The lad drew himself up and arranged his neck-cloth complacently. "There's handsomer men, to be sure; but I think Muir's better looking than any of you, Cuthbert."

Charteris laughed: "Is he not well-bred, then?"

"Oh yes, he can behave himself well enough. He's got a way of his own, you know; but then he's a clerk."

"And so are you, Jack, my man," said Charteris.

"Oh yes, but there's a difference. He's got no money—and more than that," said the juvenile merchant, "he's got no enterprise, Cuthbert. There's Alick, he had a share in a plan, sending out a lot of things to San Francisco on a venture, just when the news came about the gold, you know, and he cleared a hundred pounds; that's the way to do. But then, that fel-

low Muir, he never tries a thing; and worse than that, he went away and married somebody last year, and he had three sisters before, and them all living with him. Just think of that. Four women all dragging a young man down when he might be rising in the world. Isn't it awful?"

"A very serious burden," said Charteris, smiling, "but what is his salary, John?"

"His salary's sixty pounds; my father gives very good salaries. He's just a clerk, you know. The cashier has two hundred."

"Sixty pounds! and five people live on sixty pounds!" said the lawyer.

"And they've got a baby," said John, solemnly.

It was the climax; there was no more said.

The respectable firm of George Buchanan and Sons had its office in a dingy business street near the Exchange. The early darkness of the February night had almost blotted out the high sombre houses opposite, except for the gleaming gas-light streaming from office windows in irregular patches from garret to basement. It was not a very busy time, and at five o'clock the clerks were preparing to leave the office.

"I say, Muir," cried Richard Buchanan, bursting in hastily, "come and dine with us."

Charteris was behind. The famous Harry Muir was certainly handsome—very much better looking than any other of the party, and had a fine, sparkling, joyous, intelligent face—but the lines of it had everything in them but firmness.

"Not to-night," said the clerk, "you must not ask me to-night."

"Why not to-night?" said the young master. "Come along now, Harry. Do be a good fellow. Why it's just to-night of all nights that we want you. There's my cousin Charteris, and there's an Englishman; and we're all as flat as the Clyde. Come along, Muir, don't disoblige us."

"I am very sorry," said Muir, "but I can't stay in town to-night. Let me off to-night; I will be more obedient next time."

"He wants to get home to nurse his wife," said Buchanan, with a sneer.

"My wife is quite well," answered Harry, with a quick flush of anger; "she does not need my nursing, Mr. Buchanan."

"Mr. Buchanan! don't be ill-natured, Harry—come along."

"No, no ; I cannot go to-night. I don't think I can stay to-night," said the brilliant facile clerk.

The entreaties continued a little longer ; the resistance became feebler and more feeble, and at last, stipulating that he was to leave them early, the genius of the counting-house consented.

"Harry, my man, send a message to your wife," said a grave snuffy person, who enjoyed the two hundred pounds a year of which John had boasted, and was cashier to the Messrs. Buchanan.

Harry wavered a moment. "Where is the boy?"

"Perhaps she'll come for you, Harry," suggested the malicious Buchanan.

The poor clerk threw down, angrily, the pen he had taken up, and lifted his hat. In another minute, with quickly recovered gaiety, they went out in a band to the adjacent square where they were to dine.

"There's the makings of a capital man in that lad, and there's the makings of a blackguard," said the grave Mr. Gilchrist, shaking his head ruefully, and taking a pinch of snuff ; "it'll be a hard race—which of them will win?"

The dinner in George's-square went off very well, and the young clerk, as he warmed, dazzled the little company ; he was only a clerk—they were inclined to patronize him at other times—but now the unmistakable, undesired pre-eminence, which these young men yielded to their poor companion, was a noticeable thing. The matter of ambition now, was, who should seem most intimate with—who should most attract the attention of the brilliant clerk.

Cuthbert Charteris was a more completely educated man than any other of the party. The thorough literary training will not ally itself to the commercial, as it seems. None of the young merchants had time for the long discipline and athletic mental exercises of the student. They were all making money before they should have been well emancipated from the school-room—all independent men, when they should have been boys—and the contrast was marked enough. There was a good deal of boisterousness in their enjoyment, and they were enjoying themselves heartily, while Cuthbert, getting very weary, felt himself only preserved from utter impatience of their mirth by the interest with which the stranger inspired him—this poor, clever, facile Harry Muir.

The quick mind of this young man seemed to have attained

somehow to the results of education without the training and discipline which form so principal a part of it. He seemed to have been a desultory reader, a devourer of everything which came in his way, and while the Buchanans knew few books beyond the serial literature of the time, Harry threw delicate allusions about him, which, it seemed he made only for his own enjoyment, since the arrows flew most innocently over the heads of all the rest. Threads of connection with those great thoughts which form the common country of imaginative minds, ideas radiating out from the centre of these, like the lessening circles in the water—the student Cuthbert heard and understood, and wondered—the Buchanans applauded, and did not understand.

One of them at last proposed to go to the theatre—the rest chimed in eagerly. Cuthbert, anxious to have the evening concluded as soon as possible, and resolving to seek no more of the delectable society of his young cousins except at home, where they were tolerable, remonstrated only to be laughed at and overpowered. The grown-up, mature, educated man resigned himself to their boyish guidance very wearily—and what would their wit do now?

He said he would go home—he took up his hat, and played hesitatingly with his gloves. He was excited with the company, the applause, and a little with the wine, and was permitting himself to parley with the tempter.

“Come along, Muir, it’s only for once; let us just have this one night.”

“No, no.” The noes grew faint; the hesitation increased. He consented again.

And so, louder and more boisterous than before, they again entered the busy streets. John Buchanan was a good deal inclined to be obstreperous. It was all that Cuthbert could manage to keep him within bounds.

They had reached the Trongate, and Cuthbert stopped his young companion a moment to look down the long gleaming line of the crowded street. It had been wet in the morning, and the brilliant light from the shop windows glistened in the wet causeway in long lines, and the shifting groups of passengers went and came, ceaselessly, and the hum and din of the great thoroughfare was softened by the gloom and brightened by the light of traffic that illuminated all.

“What are you looking at? See they’re all away across the street. What’s the good of glowering down the Trongate?

"Man, Cuthbert, how slow you are," said John Buchanan, dragging the loiterer on.

There was a crowd on the opposite side which had absorbed the others. Cuthbert and John crossed over.

The accident which attracted the crowd was a very common one—an overtaken horse, wearied with the long day's labour, had stumbled and fallen; and now, the weight of the cart to which it was attached having been removed, was making convulsive plunges in the effort to rise. The carters, and the kindred class who are always to be found ready in such small emergencies, were leaping aside themselves, and pressing back the lookers on, as the poor animal struck out his great weary limbs, endeavouring to raise himself from the ground.

Suddenly there was a shrill cry—"The wean—look at the wean; the brute's fit'll kill the wean."

John Buchanan had pushed his way into the crowd, dragging with him the reluctant Cuthbert—and there indeed, close to the great hoofs of the prostrate animal, stood one of those little pale, careworn, withered children whom one sees only in the streets of great cities, and oftenest only at this unwholesome hour of night. But the acuteness peculiar to the class seemed to have forsaken the very little wrinkled old man of the Trongate. He was standing where the next plunge would inevitably throw him down, with the strange scared look which is not fear, common to children in great peril, upon his small white puckered face. Again the panting horse threw out his hoofs in another convulsive exertion. The child was down.

A shadow shot across the light. There were several cries of women. The child was thrown into somebody's arms uninjured. The horse was on his feet, and a man, indistinctly seen in the midst of the eager crowd, struggled ineffectually to raise himself from the ground, where he had fallen.

"I am hurt a little," said the voice of Harry Muir. "Never mind, it is not much, I dare say. Some of you help me up."

There was a rush to assist him; a burst of eager inquiries.

"I got a blow from the hoof; ah! I can't tell what it is," gasped the young man, over whose face the pallor of deadly sickness was stealing. He could not stand. They carried him—these rough strong men, so gently—with his friends crowding about him, to the nearest surgeon's. Everybody was sympathetic; every one interested. But Harry Muir's

head had sunk upon his breast, and the light had gone from his eyes. He was conscious of nothing but pain.

The accident was a serious one; his leg was broken.

CHAPTER II.

"He sent me hither, stranger that I am,
To tell this story."

AS YOU LIKE IT.

"CUTHBERT," said Richard Buchanan, "do, like a good fellow, go and tell his wife."

"Do you not see, man, that a stranger would alarm her more? Why make me the messenger? You say she knows you, Dick."

"Ay, she knows him," said the second brother, "but she does not know him for any good. You see, Cuthbert, Dick's always enticing poor Muir away—as he did to-night—and the wife wouldn't flatter him if he went up now."

"I don't care a straw for the wife," said Richard angrily. "It's yon grim sister Martha, and that white-faced monkey of a girl. I say, Cuthbert—you needn't go in, and they don't know you—do go before and tell them he's coming. I'll come up with him myself in the noddie—just to oblige me, Cuthbert, will you go?"

"He lives in Port Dundas-road, it's not very far. John will show you where it is," urged Alick.

Cuthbert consented to go; and the obstreperous John was very much subdued, and very ready to accompany his cousin to poor Muir's house. It was now nearly ten o'clock. The young men were all greatly concerned, and in an inner room poor Harry was getting his leg examined, and looking so deadly sick and pale as to alarm both surgeon and friends. It was his temperament, so finely organized, as to feel either pain or pleasure far more exquisitely than is the common lot.

"What will you say to them? Man, Cuthbert, are you not feared?" asked John.

"Why should I be feared? I am very sorry for her, poor woman—but is she such a fury, this wife?"

"It's not the wife, it's his eldest sister. Dick went home

with Muir one night when he was'nt quite able to take care of himself, and I can tell you Dick was feared."

"Dick was to blame—I do not feel that I am," said Charteris; "but why was he afraid?—did she say much to him?"

"She didn't say anything to him; but you know they say she's awful passionate, and she's a great deal older than Harry; and she's just been like his mother. They're always so strict, these old maids—and Miss Muir's an old maid."

"Wait, then, till I see, John," said Cuthbert; "don't try to intimidate me."

"Yonder's the house," said John.

They had just passed a great quarry, across which the dome of some large building loomed dark against the sky. Then there was a field raised high above the road, with green grass waving over the copestone of a high wall, and at the end of the field stood a solitary house. A house of some pretensions, for it boasted its street-door, and was "self-contained;" and albeit the ground-floor on either side was occupied by two not very ambitious shops, the upper flat looked substantial and respectable, although decayed.

They were on the opposite side—the street was very quiet, and their steps and voices echoed through it, so clearly that the loud John sank into whispering and felt himself guilty. The light of a very pale moon was shining into one of the windows. Looking up, Cuthbert saw some one watching them—eagerly pressing against the dark dull panes; as they crossed the street, the face suddenly disappeared.

"That's one of them," whispered John. "Isn't it awful that a poor fellow can't be out a little late, but these women are watching for him that way?"

Cuthbert did not answer. He was thinking of "these women," and their watching, rather than of the poor fellow who was the object of it.

They had not time to knock, when the door was opened wide to them, and a pale girl's face looked out eagerly. She shrank back at once with a look of blank disappointment which touched Cuthbert's heart, "I—I beg your pardon—I thought it was my brother."

"Your brother will be here very soon. He has done a very brave thing to-night, and has had a slight accident in consequence. I beg you will not be alarmed," said Cuthbert hastily.

"Oh! come in, sir, come in," said the young sister. "A

very brave thing." She repeated it again and again, under her breath.

"There's the noddy," whispered John, as he lingered behind. "I'll wait and help him in."

The door admitted into a long paved passage, terminating in a little damp "green." John Buchanan remained at the door, while Cuthbert followed the steps of his eager conductor, through the passage, and up an "outside stair," into the house. She seemed very eager, and only looking round to see that he followed her, ran into a little parlour.

"Harry is coming. He has been helping somebody, and has hurt himself, Martha; the gentleman will tell you," exclaimed poor Harry's anxious advocate, placing himself beside the chair where sat a tall faded woman, sternly composed and quiet.

"Is Harry hurt?" cried another younger and prettier person, who occupied the seat of honour by the fireside.

"He has done a very brave thing;" Cuthbert heard it whispered earnestly, into the elder sister's ear.

He told them the story. The little wife was excited and nervous—she began to cry. The sister Martha sat firmly in her chair, her stern face moved and melting. The younger girl stood behind, with her arm round her sister, and her bright tearful face turned towards Charteris. "Our Harry—our poor Harry! it was this that kept him, Martha—and he saved the child."

"What shall we do? Will he be lame?" sobbed the little wife.

The grave Martha suddenly rose from her chair as the faint sound of wheels reached them. "He is here. Rose, make the room ready for him, poor fellow. Do not let him see you crying, Agnes. Come to the door and meet him."

They went away hastily, leaving Charteris still in the room. Rose vanished by another door into an inner apartment. They were overmuch excited and anxious to remember the courtesy due to a stranger; and the stranger, for his part, was too much interested to leave them until he had seen how the sufferer bore his removal.

"Rose," said a very small voice, "has Harry come home? —Rose!" Charteris looked round him a good deal puzzled, for there was no visible owner of the little voice. There certainly was a cradle in a corner, but nothing able to speak could inhabit that.

“Rose!”

There was no answer. Then there followed a faint rustling, and then a third door opened, and a little head in a white nightcap, looked out with a pair of bewildered dark eyes, and suddenly shrank in again, when it found the room in possession of a stranger. The stranger smiled at his own somewhat strange position, and began to move towards the door—but suddenly the cradle gave sound of life, and a lusty baby voice began to cry. They were carrying the baby’s father then, into the house. The good-humoured Cuthbert rocked the cradle.

Poor Harry was still very pale, though the surgeon who accompanied him was as tender of him as the most delicate nurse, and the strong young arms of the Buchanans carried the patient like a child. *They* made their escape immediately, however,—but divided between sympathy for the family, and a consciousness of his own somewhat ridiculous position, Cuthbert stood at his post, rocking the refractory cradle. They all passed into the inner apartment. He was alone again.

It was a very plain parlour, and various articles of feminine work were scattered about the room; some small garment for the sleeping baby lay on the ground, where it had fallen from the young mother’s hand; on the table, where Martha had been sitting, was a piece of fine embroidery, stretched on two small hoops which fitted closely into each other. She had been engaged in filling up the buds and blossoms of those embroidered flowers with a species of fine needlework, peculiar to Glasgow and its dependent provinces. Another hoop, and another piece of delicate work, remained where Rose had left it. The sisters of the poor clerk maintained themselves so.

The baby voice had ceased. Groans of low pain were coming from the inner room. Cuthbert felt that he did wrong to wait, and turned again towards the door—but just then Miss Muir entered the parlour.

“The doctor thinks he will do well,” said Martha. “To-night I can hardly thank you. But he is everything to us all—poor Harry!—and to-night you will excuse us. We can think of nothing but himself. Come again, and let us thank you?”

“I will come in the morning,” said Cuthbert, “not to be thanked, but to hear how he is. Good night.”

She went with him to the door, gravely and calmly: when she had shut it upon him, she stood still, alone in the dark, to

press her hands against her heart. Again—again!—so long she had hoped that this facile temper would be steadied, that this poor brilliant wandering star would be fixed in his proper orbit. So often, so drearily, as her hopes had sunk into that blank of pain. Poor Harry! it was all they could say of him. When others praised the gay wit, the happy temper, the quick intelligence, those to whom he was dearest, could only say, poor Harry! for the good and pleasant gifts he had, made the bitterness of their grief only the deeper. Their pride in him aggravated their shame. Darkest and saddest of all domestic calamities these women, to whom he was so very dear, could not *trust* the man in whom all their hopes and wishes centred. He had not lost their affection—it seemed only the more surely to yearn over and cling to him, for his faults—but he had lost their confidence.

They could not believe him: they could not rely upon word or resolution of his. When Harry was an hour later than his usual time of home-coming, Martha grew rigid in her chair, her strong heart beating so loud that almost she could not hear those footsteps in the street for which she watched with silent eagerness; and the work fell from the hands of the young wife, and Rose stole away, pale and agitated, into the inner room, to watch at the window in the darkness; and even the little sister—the child—was moved with the indefinite dread and melancholy which is the grief of childhood. There were many grave people who would have smiled at poor Harry's sins, and counted them light and venial, but so did not these.

To lose confidence in those who are most dear to us, to be able no longer to trust word or vow—it is the climax of womanish misery,—a calamity terrible to bear!

And Martha Muir, under this discipline, was growing old. Morning after morning there had been a rebound of eager hope, only to be utterly cast down when the night fell. She had had something of the mother's pride in him—had transferred to Harry the natural ambition, the eager hopes and wishes, which for herself had all faded with her fading prime—and now, she who had so strong a will, so resolute a mind, to see this man with all his gifts, and the free scope he had to exercise them, sinking, falling, tarnishing with mean sins, the lustre and glory of his youth. Poor Harry! his stern sad sister said nothing more of blame, but as she turned again along the damp passage, and up the stairs, the heart within her

sunk into the depths. She pressed her hands upon it. Strange sympathy between the frame and the spirit, which makes it no image to say that there is a weight upon the heart!

"Martha, has Harry come home?" said the little sister, standing in her white night-dress at the door of the small bed-closet which opened from their parlour. The child's eyes were bright and wide open, as if, in her compulsory solitude in the closet, she had been steadily fixing them to keep herself awake. "When I looked out I saw a gentleman. And where's Rose and Agnes, Martha? Is Harry no weel?"

"You must go to bed, Violet," said Martha. "Poor Harry has got a broken leg. He was in the Trongate to-night with the Buchanans, and saved a child's life—but you cannot see him to-night, the doctor is with him just now, poor fellow; but go to bed, you shall see him to-morrow."

Little Violet began to cry, and the dark bewildered wide open eyes looked up inquiringly into Martha's face. Violet knew that Harry did not need to be in the Trongate with the Buchanans, and that they all waited for him very long before they would take their humble cup of tea.

"He will not be able to go out for a long time, Violet—and he saved the bairn's life," said Martha, as she put her little sister into the dark closet bed, which she herself and Rose shared, "and you must not cry—rather be thankful that the little boy's mother has not lost him, Lettie, and ask God to bless poor Harry—poor Harry! do you know you should always think of him, Violet, when you pray?"

"And so I do, Martha," said little Violet, looking up through her tears as she clung to her elder sister, the only mother she had ever known.

"Then you must let me go to him now, poor fellow," said Martha. "Hush! he will hear you crying—lie still, Lettie, and fall asleep."

One of Violet's tears rested on Martha's faded cheek—other tears came as she wiped it away. "Poor bairn—poor bairn," said the elder sister, "I might be her mother—and so I am."

When she entered the sick-room, the surgeon was just preparing to leave it. He had set the broken bone, and done all that could be done to give his patient ease. Harry, greatly exhausted, and deadly pale, was lying quiet, not strong enough to express even his suffering by more than a faint groan—and his wife and Rose watched anxiously beside him. But Har-

ry's mind was very much at ease, and tranquil. His accident covered triumphantly any error he had committed, and his anxious attendants were tranquil and satisfied too—for who could think of Harry's fault or weakness, when Harry's generous bravery had brought him so much pain. They were content to believe—and they did believe, poor eager loving hearts! that no one else could have been so daring; no one else had so little thought of personal safety—and were saying, with tears in their eyes, what a providence it was for the child and its mother, that “our Harry,” and no other, was there to rescue it.

“I am to sit up with him, Martha,” said the little wife.

“But there is the baby, Agnes,” said Rose; “you must let me sit up with Harry.”

“You must go away both of you, and sleep,” said Martha. “Hush, speak low! I cannot trust any of you, bairns—I must watch him myself. No, little matron, not you. I must take care of my boy myself—my poor Harry!”

These words so often said—expressing so much love, so much grief, they were echoed in the hearts of all.

Poor Harry! but his conscience did not smite him to-night: only his heart melted into tenderness for those who were so very tender of him, and involuntarily there came into his mind gentle thoughts of all he would do for them, when he was well again; for Harry never feared for himself.

They left his wife with him for a short time, and returned to the fireside of the little parlour—it was Saturday night, and some of their delicate work had to be finished, if possible, before the twelve o'clock bell should begin the Sabbath day.

They were but lodgers in this house. The mistress of it, a decayed widow, strong in her ancient gentility—had three daughters, who maintained themselves and an idle brother by the same work which occupied the Muirs. The collars and cuffs and handkerchiefs of richer women, embroidered by other workers, principally in Ayr and Ayrshire, were given out at warehouses in Glasgow, to the Muirs and Rodgers, and multitudes of other such, to be “opened,” as they called it—which “opening” meant filling up the centre of the embroidered flowers with delicate open-work in a variety of “stiches” innumerable. Very expert, and very industrious workers at this could, in busy times, earn as much as ten weekly shillings—and thus it was that Martha and Rose Muir supported themselves and their little sister, and were no burdens on the scanty means of Harry.

"Well, Martha!" said Rose, breathlessly, as the door of the inner room closed upon the little wife.

Martha could not lift up her eyes to meet her sister's. "Well, my dear?"

"I am sure," said Rose, "I am sure, you are quite satisfied to-night."

"Surely, surely," said the less hopeful sister—a sigh bursting, in spite of her, out of her heavy heart.

"Surely, surely—what do you mean, Martha?" said the dissatisfied Rose. "Poor Harry! you are surely pleased with him to-night."

"I said so, Rose," said Martha. "Poor Harry!"

The younger sister did not speak for a moment—then she put her work away and covered her face with her hands.

"You will never trust him—you will never trust Harry, Martha!"

Martha sighed. "I will trust God, Rose."

Rose Muir dried her eyes, and took up her work again—there was nothing to be said after that.

Martha was rocking the cradle softly with her foot; and Martha, mother-like, was fain to divert the younger heart, and make it lighter than her own. "Our poor wee Harry," she said with a smile. "Did you see what a strange nurse he had to-night?"

"Was it the gentleman?" said Rose; "did you say anything to him, Martha—he would think us very ungrateful."

"I can trust the person who rocks our cradle," said Martha. "He is coming back to-morrow to be thanked."

"On Sabbath-day!"

"It is charity to come to Harry," said Martha. "Poor Harry, how every one likes him!"

Their eyes were becoming wet again—it was a relief to hear a quiet knock at the parlour door.

The visitor was the younger Miss Rodger—a large, soft, clumsy, good-humoured girl, with a pleasant comely face. She wore a broken-down faded gown, which had once been very gay, and a little woollen shawl, put on unevenly, over her plump shoulders, and her hair in its enclosure of curl-papers for the night; ends of thread were clinging to the fringes of the shawl, and the young lady was tugging it over her shoulders, conscious of deficiencies below; but the good-humoured offer to "take the wean," or do anything that might be needed, covered the eccentricities of Miss Aggie's general house dress

and appearance. The precious child was not entrusted to her, but the hoyden's visit enlivened the sisters, and immediately after, they finished their work, and Martha saw Rose and Agnes prepare for rest, and then took her own place noiselessly by her brother's bedside.

CHAPTER III.

"How still and peaceful is the Sabbath morn !—
The pale mechanic now has room to breathe."

GRAHAM.

EARLY on the following morning, Cuthbert Charteris, after a long walk from his uncle's house, presented himself at Harry Muir's door. The street was very still and Sabbath-like. Some young workmen, in suits of snowy moleskin, stood grouped about the corner of the Cowcaddens, enjoying the sunshine, and some few who were of the more respectable Church-going class, and could not spend the after-part of the day in such a manner, were returning from early walks. There were very few shadows, however, to break the quiet, undisturbed sunshine of the usually crowded street.

The blinds were all drawn down in Mrs. Rodger's respectable house—all except one in the little parlour of the Muirs. The outer door stood ajar—it was generally so during the day—and as Cuthbert proceeded up the stairs, the grave doleful voice of some one reading aloud struck on his ear. This, and the closely-veiled windows, made him somewhat apprehensive—and he quickened his pace in solicitude for the sufferer.

The door of the house was opened to him by a little slipshod pseudo-Irish girl, who held the very unenviable situation of servant to Mrs. Rodger. The door opened into a large airy lobby, at the further end of which was Harry Muir's little-parlour; but Cuthbert's attention was drawn to another open door, through which he had a glimpse of a large kitchen, with various figures, in strange dishabille, pursuing various occupations in it—one engaged about her toilette—one preparing breakfast—and another trying to smooth out with her hands the obstinate wrinkles of a green silk gown. They were talking without restraint, and moving about continually, while at

a large deal table near the window, with her back turned to the open door, sat a tall old woman, in a widow's cap, with a volume of sermons in her hand, reading aloud. The voice was most funereal and monotonous, the apartment darkened by the blind which quite covered the window. One of the daughters caught a glimpse of the stranger, and hastily closed the door. Cuthbert turned to the little parlour with a puzzled smile.

The room was small, and garnished with a faded carpet, an old sofa, half-a-dozen ponderous mahogany chairs, and the cradle which Cuthbert had rocked the previous night. The little table was covered with a white table-cloth, and glancing with cups and saucers; and by the side of the little clear fire the kettle was singing merrily. Rose, in her Sabbath dress of brown merino, stood at the window with the baby. Martha, newly relieved from her long night's vigil in the sick room, was cutting bread and butter at the table; and in the arm-chair, with great enjoyment of the dignity, sat Violet; her attention divided between the psalm she was learning, and the little handsome feet in their snowy-white woollen stockings and patent-leather shoes, which she daintily rested upon the fender. As Cuthbert entered the room, the young wife looked out from the door of the inner apartment, with her finger on her lip, to telegraph that Harry had fallen asleep. They were all of that sanguine mood and temperament which springs up new with the light of the morning, and even on the pale dark face of Martha there were hopeful smiles.

"The surgeon has been here already," she said, "and Harry is not suffering so much as we feared he would. The symptoms are all favourable, and we may hope that it will have no ill results: the doctor says that he will not be lame, poor fellow; and now, Mr. Charteris, we have to thank you for preparing us so gently last night for the accident. It was very kind—very kind—to take so disagreeable an office on yourself, and not leave it to your cousins."

"I can assure you they were sincerely grieved," said Cuthbert, "and are very anxious about your brother."

"They are only lads," said Martha, quietly, "and have not the consideration. We could not trust youths like them, as we can trust a more mature judgment. For our own sakes, I am very glad, Mr. Charteris, that *you* saw poor Harry's accident, and the cause of it—poor Harry!"

Cuthbert Charteris was very much interested—so much so, that it did not occur to him what a very unsuitable time

he had chosen for his visit—nor that the teapot on one side of the old-fashioned grate was beginning to puff a faint intimation that it had been left there too long, and that the kettle on the other was boiling away. It was very nearly ten o'clock, and, in a few minutes, the Church-going bells would ring forth their summons. Rose began to look embarrassed, and to dread being too late for Church; but the gentleman was talking to the baby and to Martha, and steadily kept his place.

At last Rose, listening in terror for the first notes of the bell, shyly suggested to Martha that perhaps Mr. Charteris had not breakfasted.

But Mr. Charteris had breakfasted; and as Martha lifted the puffing teapot from the place which was too hot for it, and bade Violet lay down her psalm-book, and began to fill the cups, Mr. Charteris drew his seat into the window, and kept possession. He had settled himself already quite on the footing of an old friend, and began to feel it very pleasant to sit there, looking out on the fresh wintry sunshine, and the clean humble families who began to set out in little bands for the far-away old parish Churches of Glasgow—not choosing to content themselves with the Chapel-of-ease, politely called St. George's-in-the-Fields—profanely, the Black Quarry. There were a few such in this immediate neighbourhood, who went to the Barony, and the Tron and High Churches, as old residents, and rather looked down upon the new. To look out on these—the mechanic father and thrifty mother, and group of home-spun children, embellished, perhaps, with a well-dressed daughter, working in the mills, and making money—and to look in again upon the little bright breakfast-table, and the three sisters—the mature, grave, elder woman—the Rose, in the flush of her fairest years, half-blown—the little, shy, dark-eyed child—Mr. Charteris felt himself very comfortable.

They had to speak very low, for Agnes stole to the door of the inner room now and then, to lay her finger on her lips again, and telegraph the urgent necessity for silence—and speaking in half whispers makes even indifferent conversation look confidential. The friendship waxed apace—very rarely did such a man as Charteris come within sight or knowledge of this family. The atmosphere of commerce is rarely literary—in their class they had read of the fully equipped intellectual man, but had met him never.

They themselves were of an order peculiar to no class, but scattered through all; without any education worth speaking

of, except the two plain indispensable faculties of reading and writing, Harry Muir and his sisters, knowing nothing of the world, had unconsciously reached at and attained the higher society which the world of books and imagination opens to delicate minds. They were not aware that their own taste was unusually refined, or their own intellect more cultivated than their fellows, but they were at once sensible of Cuthbert's superiority, and hailed it with eager regard—not without a little involuntary pride either, to find that this, almost the most highly cultivated person they had ever met, was, after all, only equal to themselves.

There are the bells echoing one after another, through the now populous streets. Mrs. McGarvie, from the little shop below, has locked her door, and issues forth, with her good man, who is a rope-maker and deacon of his trade, to the Barony Kirk, with Rab, her large good-humoured red-haired son, and her little pretty daughter Ellen, a worker in the mill, following in her train; and with great dignity, in green silk gowns and tippets of fur, Miss Jeanie and Miss Aggie Rodger sail from the door, bound for the Relief Meeting-house, while Rose Muir ties on Violet's neat bonnet, and arranges her little cloak, and glides away herself to complete her own dress, wondering, with a little flutter, what Mr. Charteris will do now.

Mr. Charteris very speedily decided the question, for he stood waiting, with his hat in his hand, when Rose entered the parlour, cloaked and bonneted. Mr. Charteris had never heard Dr. Jamieson. He thought if the young ladies would permit him, he should be glad to walk with them to the Church.

And the young ladies did permit him, with much shy good will, and Mr. Charteris listened to Dr. Jamieson's fine voice and polished sentences with great edification. The Doctor was a man in his prime, bland and dignified, and knew all the economies of sermon-writing, and that famous art of domestic wisdom which makes a little go a great way; nevertheless, Mr. Charteris turned back some distance on the road, when the service was ended, to animadvert upon the Doctor, and to get up a very pretty little controversy with Rose, who, as in duty bound, refused to hear a word in detriment of her minister, so that the discussion carried Mr. Charteris back again to the very door, and gave him another prospect of the Misses Rodger's green silk gowns, at sight of which, raising his hat,

to the great admiration of Violet, Mr. Charteris turned reluctantly away.

CHAPTER IV.

"For the sweet Spring that bringeth joy to all,
Frets the pale sufferer bound to painful couch,
Or chamber dim and still."

THE following evening was signalised in the quiet house of Mr. Buchanan, by such a discussion as never before startled its respectable echoes. Cuthbert Charteris, lawless as Ishmael, lifted his hand against every man, and refused to confess himself worsted, though George Buchanan and Sons, as a firm, and as individuals, not to speak of Adam Smith, and the law of supply and demand, were set in battle array before him.

The subject of controversy was one which would have made the blood boil with indignation and wrath in the veins of Harry Muir, being nothing less, indeed, for a starting-point, than his salary, which the advocate, looking on the matter in a theoretical point of view, and not admitting into his consideration the "everybody else" whose practice had so large a share in forming the opinions of his cousins, condemned very strongly and clearly, to the great wrath of Richard and Alick, and the half-convinced irritation of their father, as quite an unfair and inadequate remuneration for the full time and labours of an—at least partially—educated man. Cuthbert had not at all a commercial mind, and the natural right and justice continually overshadowed with him the laws of supply and demand. It was impossible to persuade him, that any law required of him a systematic wrong, nor that a man's own personal conscience had nothing to do with his position as an employer of other men. Cuthbert would not be convinced—neither would Dick and Alick—and Mr. Buchanan himself, head of the firm and the house, took up his candle abruptly and went off, in some excitement, to his own apartment, there to sleep upon sundry propositions which had entered, like arrows, sharp and irritating, into a mind which would hear reason, whether its possessor chose or no.

Cuthbert remained some weeks in Glasgow—he had little practice to neglect at home, and the western magnates made

much of him, greatly esteeming in their hearts the metropolitan "rank" so very different from their own, which they affected to despise;—and the intercourse which he had with the Muirs, already bore a character of friendliness and confidence, such as not unusually elevates an acquaintance formed at some family crisis, into a warm and lasting friendship. But Characteris at length was going home, and, not without many jibes from his young cousins, about the strange attraction which drew him so often to visit the invalid, he set out from the office for the last time to see Harry Muir.

Very different is the look which this bustling street bears in its every-day occupation from the Sabbath quietness which hushes all its voices. Great carts are constantly passing with ostentatious din and clamour, as if proud of their load—light unburdened ones, flying up and down, with the driver perched on his little movable seat, and the end of the whip floating like a streamer over his horse's head—while now and then wearied travelling people come slowly down, carrying box and carpet bag, fresh from the tedious journeys of the canal. Violet Muir stands at the door of the little room wherein Mrs. McGarvie lives, and eats, and sells butter, brose-meal, and "speldrens," lovingly conversing with Tiger, McGarvie's great ferocious, sinister-looking dog. He is by no means prepossessing, this friend of Violet's, and has a wiry yellow coat, and a head largely developed in the animal parts, and small in the intellectual, with a fiery red truculent eye;—yet, nevertheless, he is Violet's friend, and the little girl like the fairy Titania has beauty enough in her own eyes and heart to glorify her friend withal—so Tiger is sufficiently adorned.

Shaking hands kindly in passing, and patting the little shy head which drooped under his eye, Cuthbert went up stairs through the always open door to the now familiar parlour. Harry was rapidly recovering; he had been removed from his room for the first time to-day, and now lay on the sofa, while his little wife gaily danced about the crowing baby before him. They made a pretty group, as Agnes leaned over the great arm-chair, and little Harry put forth his dimpled hand to stroke his father's cheek, but there was a little peevishness and impatience in the face which the rosy child's fingers passed over so lightly. The invalid was slightly querulous this morning.

"Just the time of all the year that I enjoy most," said Harry, "and to be shut up here now! It tries a man's patience—open the window, Rose."

"Rose got cold last night, when you had the window open," said Agnes with humility, "and the baby is not well—it may hurt yourself too, Harry."

"Nonsense. Rose can sit somewhere else. Open the window."

"Surely, if you wish it, Harry," said Rose promptly.

The day was bright, but cold, and the wind blew in, with a sudden gust, through the opened window, tossing poor Rose's hair about her face, and shaking her with a momentary shiver, but saying nothing, she withdrew quietly to a corner and resumed her work. Rose had never ventured all her life to dispute any one of Harry's caprices.

"One likes to have a glance at the world again," said Harry, raising himself on his pillows. "Yonder comes the postman, Agnes—see, he is holding up a letter—run, and get it, Rose; and yonder is Rab McGarvie, carrying a peck of brose-meal to somebody, and little Maggie McGillivray clipping at the door. It is pleasant to see them all, and this wind, how fresh and wholesome it is. Lift the window a little more, Martha—just for a moment."

"It is very cold, Harry," pleaded the little wife.

"Nonsense," repeated Harry, "don't you think it is quite warm for the season, Mr. Charteris? Martha!"

Martha rose with sudden impatience, threw down her work, and rapidly closed the window. She did not speak, but Cuthbert saw a strange combination of the strongly-marked lines on her forehead, and a close compression of her lips, which did not look very peaceable. The act itself was not very peaceable certainly, but there was a suppressed passion in her look and manner, which had a singular effect upon the stranger.

Harry Muir said nothing, but he threw himself back upon the pillow, sullen and offended. There was a scared timid expression on the face of the young wife, and little Violet glided up behind Martha, and laid her hand upon her sister's shoulder in childish deprecation.

Just then Rose entered with the letter. "It is from Ayr, from my uncle," she said. "Shall I open it, Harry?"

"As you please," said Harry, sulkily.

She cast a hurried glance round the room, pausing for a moment with a searching, inquisitive, painful look, as her eye fell on Martha. Then she came to her brother's side, and laid her hand softly with a half caress upon his arm.

"Shall I read what my uncle says, Harry, for everybody's

benefit? Uncle Sandy always writes to the whole of us, you know."

There was no answer. Cuthbert took up his hat, and rose with embarrassment. The scene was becoming painful.

"You are not going away, Mr. Charteris," said Agnes, anxiously; "pray don't go away so soon, when this is your last visit too; and I am sure Harry has never had an opportunity before to thank you for your kindness, nor indeed any of us, except Martha. Martha had to make all our thanks."

"Did you, Martha?" asked Rose.

Cuthbert turned away his head. He did not wish them to think that he saw through those little palpable affectionate artifices of theirs to heal the new-made breach.

"Martha!" repeated Rose, under her breath.

And Cuthbert looked stealthily at this passionate face. The rigid lines were relaxing slowly; the muscles of the mouth moving and trembling; fierce and strong anger melting into inexpressible tenderness and sorrow. Vain anger, bootless yearnings, which might spend their strength for ages, like the great sea upon the sand, and never change its form.

"Mr. Charteris, I fear, got but few thanks from me," said Martha, slowly; "but Mr. Charteris has seen us since, and knows that to do kindness to Harry is to have the greatest gratitude we can feel."

There was another pause, and the stranger could easily perceive that, facile as Harry was elsewhere, he liked to reign at home, and did not very readily forgive any resistance to his will. He had, indeed, been very querulous, and unreasonable this morning, and this was only the climax of a series of petty selfishnesses which had exhausted Martha's powers of long-suffering.

"Shall we see you soon in Glasgow again?" asked Harry, at length, turning once more to Cuthbert.

"In a few weeks, perhaps; I may have some business," said Cuthbert, with embarrassment. "You will be strong again then, I hope. My uncle commissions me to say that you must take full time to recover, and not hurry to the office too soon."

"Mr. Buchanan is always very kind," said Agnes.

"Is he?" said Cuthbert, smiling, "scarcely kind enough, I am disposed to think; but I believe it is not the inclination that is defective in my uncle. These trammels of ordinary usage—doing as other people do—have a great effect upon

men occupied as he is. He does not take time to judge for himself, and exercise his own generosity and justice."

Cuthbert concluded in some haste. Quite consistent as this apology was with his own previous thoughts, it suddenly occurred to him that it was quite irrelevant and unnecessary here.

"Mr. Buchanan has done perfect justice to Harry, I fancy," said Martha Muir, raising her thin figure from its habitual stoop, and speaking in a tone of cold *hauteur*, which, like the passion, revealed a new phase of her character to Cuthbert, who watched her with interest; "and as for generosity, Mr. Charteris, your uncle seems by no means deficient where there is any scope for that. I see his name often in the papers. You judge Mr. Buchanan hardly."

Cuthbert comprehended, and was silent. Between the rich man's indifference and the poor man's pride it was difficult to steer; and Richard and Alick Buchanan were not more haughtily offended at the accusation of treating their clerks unfairly than was Harry Muir's sister at the suggestion that his employer's generosity could reach him.

"This poor leg of mine is nearly a month old now," said Harry, "and except some grave visits from Gilchrist, no one has ever taken the trouble to inquire for me. I suppose your cousins are more pleasantly occupied."

"I rather think Dick is afraid," said Cuthbert.

He was singularly unfortunate in his choice of subjects. A little red spot began to burn on Harry's cheek; poor fellow, he wanted to be angry.

"Afraid!"

"I mean, they would rather not encounter the ladies till you are quite recovered. Persuading you to go with them, you know, burdens their conscience, because it exposed you to this accident. Not, of course, that any one was to blame," said Cuthbert, hurriedly, and with some confusion.

"Their conscience is over scrupulous," said Harry, looking round him with a smile of defiance. "I went with them for my own pleasure; so far as there is any blame it is entirely mine."

Poor Harry, weak and yielding as the willow in the wind, there was no blame to which he was so nervously susceptible as this—no accusation which he denied and defied with so much anger.

Cuthbert turned again to the window. Just before him,

in a half-built street, which struck off at right angles from the road to Port Dundas. Maggie McGillivray sat in the cold sunshine on the step of her mother's door, "clipping,"* with a web of tamboured muslin on her knee and scissors in her hand. Maggie, as Violet Muir could have testified, was only sixteen, though her "clipping" had helped the family income for several years, and her own money had purchased for her the little bright red tartan shawl which just covered her stout shoulders, but left her arms unincumbered and her hands free. On the half-paved road before her stood a mill-girl, with whom work was "slack," and who had spent a full hour this morning elaborating the beautiful plaits and braids of her crisped hair. This young lady, with much gesture and many superlatives, was describing to the busy little worker an itinerant show which had fixed its temporary quarters at Port Dundas, wherein there was a giant and a dwarf, a beautiful lady who danced, and a boy who had pink eyes, and which she herself was on the way to see; but Maggie clipped and shook her head, unfolding the web, to show her tempter how much had to be done before one o'clock, when she must lay it by, to take up the pitcher with her father's broth, and carry to him his wholesome dinner; and when the idler sauntered on, to seek some less scrupulous companion, Maggy returned to her labour with such alacrity, that Cuthbert fancied he could almost hear the sound of the shears, and the loud clear tilt of the "Learig," to which they kept time.

Yet Maggie McGillivray was only a humble little girl, while Harry Muir, in his way, was an accomplished man. Cuthbert looked back upon the young man's fine intelligent face, on which the proud look of defiance still lingered, with a sigh of pity and regret—not so would *he* have overcome the temptation.

* Another feminine craft peculiar to the "west country," where many young girls, of a class inferior to the workers of embroidery and spinning, are employed to clip the loose threads from webs of worked muslin.

CHAPTER V.

"She had such a nature,
You would have thought some fairy, 'ware o'th' hour,
When out of heaven came a young soul, predestined
For a King's heir, to make a conqueror of him
Had, by some strange and wondrous art, diverted
The new-born spirit from its proper course,
And hid it in the form of a poor maiden ;
Leaving the princely weakling in his cradle,
Shorn of the fate that waited him : the other
Chafing at its caged limits all its days——"

OLD PLAY.

A SELF-WILLED, proud, ambitious woman, with a strong, clear, bold intellect, a passionate temper, and vehement feelings, Martha Muir had been born. So much education as she had tended all to reduce her to the due humility of poverty and womanhood, but surrounded always by placid natures, who never fully comprehended the stormy spirit with which they had to deal, Martha, dwelling alone, and hiding in her own heart the secret aspirations which no one round her could have understood, remained as proud, as self-willed, and as ambitious as she had been born.

For hers were not the hopes and fancies common, as people say, to youthful women. Advantages of appearance she had never possessed, and the children who were growing up at her feet absorbed all the passionate affections of their grave sister ; but Martha's hopes were visions of unmitigated ambition, eager to work out for itself a future worthy of its own bold spirit, for it was not of windfalls, or happy chances, or of fortune to be bestowed on her by another, but of that ladder "to which the climber upwards turns his face," that the solitary woman dreamed.

To raise them—these children—to that indefinite rank and honour which exists in the fancy of the young who are poor, to win for them exemption from those carking cares amid which her own youth, a strong plant, had grown green and flourished. Such hopes were strong in the heart of the passionate girl when people round her thought her only a child ; and when darker necessities came, when following many little pilgrims. the father and the mother went away, leaving her the head of the sadly diminished family, her strong desire, intensified by great grief, possessed her like a fiery tormenting spirit. She

was then a woman of only twenty years, while Harry was but thirteen; and Martha prayed in an agony for means—only means, to let her strong energies forth and labour for her children, but the means never came—how could they? and all she could do in her passion of ambitious love was to toil day and night for their bread.

No one of all her friends knew how to deal with Martha, so that her impatient soul knew no discipline except the inevitable restraints of poverty, and these, if they humble the pride, are but spurs to the eager fancy, burning to escape from their power. Through all the years of romance the wish and hope to do somewhat had filled Martha's mind with visions; but then came those slow, gradual steady years, wherein the light of common day began to blot out the radiant mists of the morning, and as her hopes fell one by one, and one by one the months lengthened, filled with the tedious labour which gave such scope for thought, bitterness came in like deep waters into the fierce heart, which rendered all its strength to that might of disappointment, and wrestled with itself like a caged eagle. To find that after aspiring to do all, one can do nothing—that soaring in fancy into the broad firmament, in the body one must condescend to all the meanest and smallest cares of daily life—to dream of unknown heights to be attained, and to find instead that by the slow toil of every long uninteresting day one must labour for daily bread, it is not wonderful that the awaking was bitter, and all the more, that in both the dream and the awaking she was uncomprehended and alone.

They all lay dead these hopes of her strange solitary youth, but as they died others rose. This boy, in whom the young beautiful life rose with a grace which she knew it never had in herself, what might he not do? and so she set herself to train him. The old lore that is in all hearts of the brave and of the great, the histories of Scripture, which live for ever; all that God has recorded for us of his servants' stout lives, and much that men have written in lesser records. The lonely young woman, feeling herself grave and old among her neighbours, poured all her vehement heart into the glowing intelligence of the boy. She began to think it well that those chimeras of her own had fallen like withered leaves to enrich the soil, and in him would be the glorious spring.

How was it now? The deep red flush which sometimes burned on Martha's cheek, the anger which only one of so dear

regard could awaken, and sadder still, the utter heaviness with which her heart sank in the rebound, proclaimed the end of her second harvest. The first time she had sowed in proud wilfulness, it was meet she should reap disappointment; but the second seed-time had been in hope more Christianlike, and with strong crying for the sunshine and the dew—the wonderful sunshine and dew of high heaven—which never had fallen upon her seed.

It seemed that her fate had been born with her. The proud and passionate temper to be thwarted and crossed at every turn. The vehement ambitious mind, to be disgraced and humbled, and with those arrows in her heart, she was now fighting with herself a greater fight than she had ever hazarded before, subduing herself to herself, and to the Higher One, who thus painfully had brought back the rebel soul to His allegiance. It was hard to subdue the old passion—the old pride, but she had begun to sanctify her contest now, when it had come to the bitterest.

No other trial could have been so hard to her as this, it struck at her very life. Misfortunes against which she could struggle would have been happy discipline to Martha, but to look on helplessly while these elements of ruin were developing in the life of her brother; to stand by and see him fall lower and lower into the poor and petty sins which she despised—to watch the slow coming of disgrace and wretchedness which she could not lift a finger to avert, who can wonder that the proud spirit was chafed into passions of fierce anger sometimes, and sometimes into very despair, but Martha never spoke of what she suffered—she only said “Poor Harry!”

“Shall I read my uncle’s letter now?” asked Rose, when Cuthbert was gone.

“Surely,” said Harry, whom some slight incident had restored to perfect good-humour. “Surely, Rosie, let us hear what the old man says.”

“I write this to let you know that I am quite well,” read Rose, “though a little troubled with the rheumatism in my right arm, which always comes on about the turn of the year, as you will all mind; and I am very sorry to hear of Harry’s accident; but there is less matter for lamentation, it being gotten in a good way, as I have no doubt Martha will mind. The town crier, Sandy Proudfoot, broke his leg at Hogmanay, and it’s never mended yet; but I cannot see what better the

daidling body had to expect, it being a thing well known, that when the accident was gotten he was as he should not have been, which is a great comfort in respect of Harry. I hope all the rest of ye are well and doing well, and desire to see some of you at Ayr as soon as ever it can be made convenient. If Violet is inclined to be delicate, send her out to me for a change. The guard of the coach would take good care of her, and I will pay her passage myself. I hope she is minding her lessons and learning to help the rest with the opening, and that Rose is intent, as the cottar says, and minds her duty duly, and that Harry is steady and 'grees with his wife. As for Martha, seeing she knows what is right better than I can tell her, I have nothing to say, but that I hope she keeps up to the mark, which she knows, and has her own judgment in her favour, of which, if she is sure, I know she will be feared for no other in the world. And so I remain, my dear bairns, your affectionate uncle—ALEXANDER MUIR."

"What do you say, Agnes," said Harry, "do we agree?"

The little wife smiled. "When you behave yourself, Harry," she said, laying her child in the cradle.

"If we could manage it," said Martha, "when Harry is able to walk, Agnes, I think you should go down together to see my uncle. You have never been in Ayr."

Agnes looked up brightly. "And I should like so well to go; and it would do Harry so much good. But then, Martha, how can we afford it?"

Harry winced visibly. Some debts of his own, recklessly and foolishly incurred, had made the long-projected journey to Ayr impracticable a year ago; the fifteen pounds could do so little more than provide for the bare wants of the quarter; and yet again there were other debts waiting the next payment of salary. Poor Harry!

"I have been thinking," said Martha, quietly; "I see how we can manage, Agnes; we will only work the more busily, Rose and I, while you are away, and Harry will be the better of it. I see how we can do it. It will do Harry good to see my uncle and the little quiet house again."

Harry felt there was meaning in her voice. To dwell again under the humble roof where all her hopes for his young life had risen; where she had nursed and tended the dawning mind within him, and laboured to lift his eyes, and teach him to look upward bravely, like a young eagle to the sun. Alas, poor Harry! For this revival of the unstained hopes of youth,

Martha was willing to toil all the harder at her tedious unceasing toil; and he felt, almost for the first time, how hopeless these hopes were. How different were his expectations and hers.

"It is a shame," he said, abruptly, "for a rich man like Buchanan to keep us down so. We require a little relaxation, a little ease, as well as them; and I would like to know how it is possible we can get it on sixty pounds a year?"

"Peter McGillivray has only fourteen shillings a week," said Rose.

"And what then?"

"He keeps a family on it, Harry; at least his wife does; but then she is very thrifty."

"Thrifty! nonsense. Is not Agnes thrifty too? You are a foolish girl, Rose," said her brother; "you think a few shillings is a great fortune. There now, a pound or two would take us comfortably down to my uncle's; but how can we spare that off the pittance they give me?"

Yet Harry remembered that his own private expenses—the little debts of which his wife and sister knew nothing—amounted to more than that needful pound or two, and the remembrance brought a flush to his face and made him angry.

"There is a meanness attends this mercantile wealth," he exclaimed hastily; "a want of thought and consideration of others. What are we clerks but the stuff these masters of ours are made of? and yet how they keep us down."

"They were themselves kept down, and overcame it," said Martha.

"Well, it is not a very noble art, the art of making money," said Harry, with assumed carelessness. "Dick Buchanan and the rest of them are shallow fellows in spite of it all. And their father, he has made a fortune, but the honest man is no genius."

"But it is a noble art to refuse to be kept down," said the ambitious Martha, with a kindling of her eye. "I am ashamed to think that Mr. Buchanan or any other ordinary person can keep down my brother; and he cannot, Harry. You have less perhaps than you ought to have now, but win more; that is your refuge. And don't let us throw the responsibility on other people. We have only to answer for ourselves."

"Well, Martha," said Harry, looking up, "we have not much of the mammon of unrighteousness to answer for. I will tell my uncle you have grown charitable; that is, if it be at all possible to get to Ayr."

"What do you think, Martha?" said Agnes, with some solicitude in her face.

"You must go; that is all," said Martha.

The little wife was by no means self-opiniated. She had a great reverence for, and faith in, the decrees of Martha, and knew that what her grave sister resolved would be accomplished "some way," so she returned pleasantly to the cradle.

"And I don't want to go, Martha," whispered little Violet, desiring to have her sacrifice appreciated. "My uncle will give the money to Agnes, and I will stay at home and help you to open."

"But you would like to go, Lettie?" said Rose.

"No; I would rather stay at home with Martha and you. I think, Martha," whispered Violet again, "that it will be fine to be our lane just for a wee while—when Agnes is with Harry."

In the elder mind there was a response to the child's thought—to know that Harry was safe with the good uncle, and the anxious little wife to guard him, while yet they themselves were left a little while alone, freed from their constant anxiety, to rest and take breath for the future which remained, with all its unknown cares before them. There was something in the thought which gave Martha relief, and yet oppressed her with a heavier sadness; but Agnes was already gay in anticipation, and eagerly discussing what she should take of her little wardrobe, and how many frocks for baby Harry—for Agnes was still only a girl, and the unusual pleasure filled her with wholesome natural delight—a good and happy contagion which soon spread itself in softened degrees over all the rest.



CHAPTER VI.

"He left me wi' his deein' breath,
A dwelling-house, and a' that."

OLD SONG.

"I WANT a next of kin, Charteris," said an Edinburgh W. S., entering the little office where Cuthbert sat, solemnly considering the morning's paper, opposite an elbow-chair, which had very seldom been honoured by the presence of a client. "I want a next of kin, and I can't tell where to find him."

The speaker was a young man about Cuthbert's own age, who like himself had newly begun to encounter for himself the cares and responsibilities of business. They had come together through the training of the High-School and College, and now were great friends and allies, furthering each other's progress, by all means in their power.

"Advertise," said the laconic Cuthbert, from behind the folds of his newspaper.

"Oh, oracle!" answered Mr. David Lindsay, throwing down a black crumpled "*Times*," which struck upon the fair broadsheet of "*The Scotsman*," and compelled the reader's attention. "And suppose I have advertised, and failed—what then?"

"It's a cold day, Davie," responded the learned advocate. "Sit down, Lord Lion, and tell me all about it."

"I say, Cuthbert, there's a story," said the W. S. mysteriously.

Cuthbert stirred the fire, and prepared to listen.

"Up near the links of Forth, there is a gray old house called Allenders," said Lindsay, with some importance, "and in the house there dwells a family as your penetration will guess—or rather, dwelt a family—for they are now extinguished—Allenders of Allenders—and between four and five hundred a-year; now that's what I want a man for, Cuthbert."

"Between four and five hundred a-year," repeated Cuthbert gravely. "I would take it myself, to oblige you, Davie."

"Thank you—I could get lots," said the representative of the poet King-at-Arms. "But the right man, Charteris—by-the-bye, I should say the right woman—the right two women—where to lay my hands on them."

"So the heir is extant after all," said Cuthbert; "you know that, do you?"

"Wait a little, and I'll tell you what I know. They have always been a highly respectable family, these Allenders, mind, and you know what that means; comfortable, slow, common-sense folk, with no hair-brained sentimental traces about them. Well! the last father of them had seven sons—there was no appearance of a lack of heirs then—and one of the sons, the third or fourth I think, took it into his head to be a—what is your most philosophical name for it—the Allenders said a sentimental fool—which means, you know, that he married somebody."

"I beg to assure you that there is no sort of philosophy in that achievement, Lion," said Cuthbert.

"Don't interrupt me, Charteris—why, man, a romantic episode in the history of a dull family is a treasure. This son, his name was John—everybody's name is John—married some poor girl or other in Stirling, and thereupon followed a regular tragic disowning of the refractory son. The good people were startled out of their propriety; never an Allender had been known before to do anything out of the ordinary jog-trot, and the example of his daring aroused his father and his brethren. They cast him out—they banished him from the paternal countenance, and from all hope of ever inheriting the paternal acres, and so left him to seek his fortune, as he best could. That was seventy years ago."

"Seventy years! why, the man must be dead," said Charteris.

"Very possibly. It does not concern me that," said Lindsay. "Well, Charteris, this sentimental John got some sort of situation in Stirling, and was by no means annihilated by the family ban. He throve and multiplied for a few years—then his wife died suddenly, leaving him with two daughters, and then he disappeared.

"Where he went to, there is not the least clue. The man was half mad with grief, I suppose. It was said he was going to England—and it was said he was going to America. It seems quite impossible to discover—every trace of him is gone. And now all the seven sons are exhausted; after all, it must be best to be stagnant, Charteris—for see you, whenever this romance stepped in among the decent people, what a blight it brought upon them. Four of them died unmarried—other two had children who have grown old and died during the lingering lifetime of the last proprietor. He was a childless widower—and now the old man has gone too; and where am I to get those heirs?"

"Did he know nothing of them?" said Cuthbert.

"Nothing; he died very old—upwards of ninety—and his senses failed him; but his memory seems to have turned with a strange kind of affection to this poor sentimental lost John. There are some far away cousins who would claim as heirs, but the old laird left a will, ordaining that search should be first made for the children of John Allender's children! they will not be quite youthful now."

"And there is no trace?" said Cuthbert.

"None, but a rather fantastic one," said Lindsay, smiling. "The favourite female name of the Allenders family was Violet—old Allender thought it certain that one of those chil-

dren would be called Violet—and their mother's name was Rose. What's the matter, Cuthbert?"

"Strange!" said Cuthbert, looking up, with a start. "Why, I met a family in Glasgow, last month, in which there were both these names."

"Ay—where? what's their name? who are they?" said Lindsay eagerly.

"Their name is Muir—they are rather a noticeable family in many respects," said Cuthbert, with a little hesitation; "but so far as pecuniary matters go, very humble people. Could it be? Rose and Violet—there can be no mistake about the names. I'll tell you what, Lindsay, I'll go through, myself, to the west, and find it out."

"Many thanks. I had no idea you took so much interest in these professional investigations," said Lindsay, with some curiosity, "I think it is more in *my* department than yours, Cuthbert."

"You don't know them, Davie, you're an alien and a foreigner, and an east countryman, whereas my mother is a Buchanan! I am free of the city, Lion, and then, I know the Muirs."

"Well, Cuthbert, you know your own secrets, I suppose," said Lindsay, laughing, "and whether it is just professional zeal, or no, all this I won't inquire, but as for all your rubbish about east countrymen, you don't mean me to believe that, you know. Of course, if you are acquainted with the family, that is a great matter. But mind, be cautious!"

"Look at '*The Scotsman*,' Davie," said Cuthbert, "and keep silence, while I read your advertisement. There now, be quiet."

Two stories up in the honourable locality of York Place, lived Cuthbert's mother. They were not very rich, certainly, but the old lady had a sufficient portion of the means of comfort, to prove her a Buchanan. She was a little, brisk, active woman, under whose management everything became plentiful. It was not an economical propensity, but, refined and somewhat elegant though Mrs. Charteris' own individual tastes were, it was an indispensable thing with her that there should be "routh" in her house. So there were dependants hanging about her door at all times, and stores of bread and broken meat dispensed to all comers. Mrs. Charteris had unlimited faith in her two neat, blooming, sister servants. She thought they could discriminate the line between plenty and waste,

almost as distinctly as she did herself, and when Cuthbert returned home that day he found his mother delivering a short lively lecture on the subject—a lecture such as was rather a habit of hers—to the elder of the two trusted confidential maids.

“You see, Lizzie, my woman, to lay the moulins out of the bread-basket on the window-sill for the sparrows is very kindly and wiselike—a thing that pleases me—but to crumble down one side of the good loaf that we’re using ourselves, is *waste*. You see the difference. It might have been given to some poor body.”

“Yes, mem,” said Lizzie, demurely, “and so I did. I gi’ed the ither half o’ the loaf to Margaret Lowrie.”

Mrs. Charteris looked grave for a moment. “We were using it ourselves, Lizzie; but to be sure, in a house where there’s plenty, there should aye be the portion for folk that have more need, and as long as it’s lawfully used, Lizzie, I never find fault, but to waste is a great sin. Now, you’ll mind that, and take the moulins after this for the sparrows.”

“It’s Mr. Cuthbert, mem,” said Jess, the younger sister of the two, returning from the door, and the little active old lady rustled away in her black silk gown to her parlour to see what had brought home her son at so unusual an hour.

The parlour or drawing-room, for it might be called either, was a handsome room, though it was on the second story, and its very comfortable furniture had an air of older fashion than the present time, which suited very gracefully with the age of its mistress. Near one of its large windows stood an antique spider-legged table, bearing a work-box of somewhat elaborate manufacture, an open book, with Mrs. Charteris’ silver thimble lying on it for a mark, and Mrs. Charteris’ work by its side, while within reach of these stood an easy chair and a footstool. The spring was brightening rapidly, and Mrs. Charteris’ chair stood always in this window, when the weather permitted her to leave the fireside, for here, as she plied her sewing, or glanced up from her book, she could observe the passengers in the street below, and watch for Cuthbert as he came home from his little office. Cuthbert had a slight look of excitement to-day, his mother thought, as she took off her spectacles and looked at him with her own kindly unassisted eyes. Mrs. Charteris fancied her son had perhaps got a brief.

“Well, Cuthbert, my man, what brings you home so soon?” said Mrs. Charteris, sitting down in her chair, and drawing in her footstool.

"I think I will go through to Glasgow to-morrow, mother," said Cuthbert hastily.

The old lady looked up with her glasses on. There was certainly an unusual flush and a happy embarrassed smile upon the face of her good son.

"The laddie's possessed!" said Mrs. Charteris. "What would you do in Glasgow again so soon? It is not a month since you came home, Cuthbert!"

"Neither it is, mother," said the advocate, "but I have got some business in hand—a mystery, mother, to exercise my legal judgment on."

Mrs. Charteris was interested. "Aye, what's that?"

There was a good deal of hesitation—about the learned gentleman—it was evident there was no fee in this case.

"I told you about that young man, mother,—that family of Muirs."

The old lady looked up quickly. She was a good deal interested in this family of Muirs, partly because her son had spoken much of them, and still more because he seemed so very willing to return to the subject. "What about them, Cuthbert?"

"I had Davie Lindsay with me to-day," said Cuthbert, lifting up and turning over the pages of his mother's book. "He is very anxious to trace out the heirs of a small old estate near Stirling, and I've a notion these Muirs are the people he wants."

Mrs. Charteris dropped her work on her knee, and looked up with much interest.

"The lost heir had two daughters called Rose and Violet,—rather a singular conjunction. Now the two younger Muirs bear these names—a strange coincidence, if it is nothing else—and if one could help such a family. I told you how much they interested me, mother."

"Yes," said the old lady, "Violet—that was the little girl—I heard you mention her—but which of them is Rose?"

Mr. Cuthbert Charteris looked a little foolish, and withdrew into the shadow of the curtain, which fortunately was green, and neutralized the slight unusual flush upon his face. "One forgets these girls' names," he said, with a short laugh, "though this is rather a pretty one. The elder one is Martha, you know, mother—a grave enough name to make up for the romance of the other two—the intermediate young lady is Rose."

"How old is she, Cuthbert?" interrogated his mother.

"I really am no judge—I could hardly guess—quite young though," said Cuthbert hurriedly, "but the similarity of names is very striking, and if I could trace out a relationship, I should be exceedingly pleased, mother; besides, that one is bound, as a matter of duty, to assist in proving a birth-right in any circumstances—and this young man will never do in business, it is clear—whereas he might make a capital country gentleman."

Mrs. Charteris was a little prejudiced. She shook her head: "It is not so easy to make a gentleman, Cuthbert; the transition from sixty pounds a-year to five hundred, though it must be very comfortable, no doubt, will never accomplish that."

"Harry Muir, mother," said Cuthbert, "is not a wise man by any means—at five and twenty, I scarcely think I was very wise myself—but Harry Muir with his sixty pounds, is a gentleman already. I am afraid Dick Buchanan would suffer very greatly if you saw them together, and compared the two."

"Ritchie Buchanan is your cousin, Cuthbert," said the old lady, warmly. "He is called after my father, who *was* a gentleman though he was not so rich as his son. To be sure these laddies were very loud the last time I saw them, and I believe Ritchie had a ring, and no glove upon his hand—but still, Cuthbert, you must not be an ill bird."

"Well, we shall see," said Cuthbert, smiling. "Wait till I show you Harry Muir, mother—no discredit to Dick, or any of them—but my uncle's clerk is a very different person; poor fellow!—if he only had half as much prudence as the youngest of them, it would be better for him. He is of that class, who, people say, are nobody's enemies but their own."

"And that is just the most hopeless class of all, Cuthbert," said Mrs. Charteris; "you may cure a bad man that has '*faith*,' you may turn a vessel that is ballasted and steady into another course, but for your bits of gay pleasure-boats that float with the stream, alack and woe is me! It is a hopeless work, Cuthbert, you never tried your hand at anything so vain."

"That is the sister's work, not mine, mother," said Cuthbert, "and I can believe it is not a very promising one, but in the meantime, I must try and lay my hands upon the clue which will conduct Davie Lindsay to his end, and give him an heir to Allenders. Of course, I will not speak of it to the family till I have ascertained something more about these names, but

I think the result is very likely to be what I heartily wish it may."

"I will wager you a silver crown, Cuthbert," said Mrs. Charteris, "that the bairn is called after old Mrs. Violet Primrose of Govan, and that Mrs. Hervey of Monkland, is the name-mother of the elder one; and to make it the more appropriate, to-morrow is the first of April, and Davie Lindsay has sent you on a gouk's errand, for a credulous callant as you are; now mind, I told you."

"Very well, mother, we shall see," replied Cuthbert.

CHAPTER VII.

"He has a secret motive in his search,
Honest, yet would he not that all the world
Saw full into his heart:—a right good heart—
Devising nothing evil, yet aware
Of certain silent secrets of its own."

OLD PLAY.

It was not without a little embarrassment that Cuthbert presented himself next day at the office of his uncle. It was the day before the dispatch of one of the mails, and everybody in the office was very busy. Round the desk of Mr. Gilchrist, the cashier, who had the capital business head, and the two hundred yearly pounds, the snuff lay in little heaps, and all the clerks of meaner degree were working furiously, with scarcely time to interchange now and then the usual *badinage* of the counting-house; while, in Mr. Buchanan's room, Richard sat writing letters beside his father.

"Better get away out of town, Cuthbert," said the merchant, "we shall be late to-night; but your aunt and Clemie are at home, and are always glad to see you, you know, whereas we shall only bore you, if you wait for us. I think you had better go down to Greenbank at once."

"Very well, uncle," said Cuthbert. He was quite resigned to postpone his enjoyment of their company for a few hours. "I have some business to do, but I shall get home before you, I think."

"I say, Cuthbert," said Richard in an aside, "why don't you ask for Harry Muir? I believe you've been there already."

"Then you believe nonsense, Dick," said Cuthbert, with a little heat. "How is he, poor fellow?"

"He's gone down to Ayr. Oh, he's recovering fast," said Richard. "These women made it worse than it was, you know, with their lamentations. I suppose you're going to call, Cuthbert?"

"I am going to look after a case which my friend Lindsay is engaged in," said Cuthbert, with some dignity. "I must do that before I make any calls. There now, that will do—you are sure to be late with your letters, Dick."

"I should not wonder," mused Dick Buchanan, as Cuthbert made his escape, "if his business was in Port Dundas after all." And the curious young merchant endeavoured to discover, through the opaque window, which course his cousin took; but the endeavour was quite unsuccessful. The dim yellow pane preserved Cuthbert's secret.

It was past mid-day when Cuthbert reached the busy road to Port Dundas. It was, as usual, noisy and loud, and crowded with echoing carts on its causeway, and streams of mill-girls pouring along its pavement, returning to the factories after dinner. Little stout round forms—faces sometimes sallow, but by no means unhealthy—hair dressed with extreme regard to the fashion, and always excellently brushed, and in the finest order—made these passengers, in their coloured woollen petticoats and bright short gowns, a very comely part of the street population. Very true most of them planted broad, sturdy, bare feet upon the dusty pavement; but the free loud mirth, no less than the comfortable habiliments, showed them quite removed from the depressing effects of extreme poverty—as indeed they were.

And opposite Harry Muir's house, in the little half finished street, Maggie McGillivray still sat clipping, with her brisk scissors in her hand, sending her loud clear voice into the din like an arrow—and still another branch of the Glasgow feminine industry came under the amused observation of Cuthbert before he reached the little parlour.

Miss Aggie Rodger, with her large shoulders bursting from under the little woollen shawl, and a great rent in the skirt of her faded large-patterned cotton gown, sat on the highest step of the stair, holding in her hand a very dingy piece of embroidered muslin, which she was jerking about with wonderful rapidity as she "opened it." Miss Aggie, like the humbler clipper, was lightening her task with the solace of

song ; but, instead of the clear flowing canty “Learig,” Miss Aggie, with great demonstration, was uttering the excellences of the Rose of Allandale. Both the natural voices were tolerably good ; but Cuthbert thought he preferred Maggie McGillivray’s.

In the little “green,” to which the paved passage from the street directly led, Miss Rodger, the elder sister, was laying out the collars and caps of the family to bleach. Miss Rodger was, in her way, a very proud person, and had a severe care-worn face, which, six or seven years ago, had been pretty. From the green, Cuthbert heard her addressing her sister :

“Aggie, haud your tongue. Folk would think to see ye that you kent nae better than the like of that lassie McGillivray. They’ll hear ye on the street.”

“Ye can shut to the door, if ye’re so proud,” responded Miss Aggie, drawing out the long quavers of her song with unabated zeal.

Miss Jeanie, the prim intermediate sister, looked out from the kitchen window, and interrupted the dialogue in a vehement whisper :—“Aggie, will ye come out of that, and no let yoursel be seen, such a like sight as ye are ? do ye no see the gentleman ? ”

Miss Aggie looked up—saw Cuthbert standing below—and, snatching up the torn skirt of her gown in her hand, fled precipitately, leaving behind her a considerable-sized dilapidated slipper, trodden at the heel, which had escaped from her foot in her flight.

“I’ve lost yin o’ my bauchals. Throw it into us, woman Jean—what will the strange man think ? ” cried Miss Aggie, disconsolately, as she reached the safe refuge of the kitchen.

Miss Jeanie was dressed—for this was the day on which they carried home their finished work to the warehouse which supplied them. Miss Jeanie was very prim, and had a little mouth, which she showed her appreciation of, as the one excellent feature of her tolerable face, by drawing her lips together, and making them round. She was magnificently arrayed in a purple silk gown, bound round the waist with a silken cord, from which hung a superb pair of tassels. This dress was by far the grandest article of apparel in the house ; and with great awe and veneration, Violet Muir had just intimated to her sisters, that Miss Jeanie was going to the warehouse, and that she had on her Adelaide silk gown. Adroitly extending the skirt of this robe of state to cover the unlucky

“bauchal” of Miss Aggie, Miss Jeanie primly stood by the open door, admitting the visitor, and Cuthbert entered without making any further acquaintance with the family.

The same universal feminine work re-appeared in the parlour, where Martha sat by the window in her usual place, busy with her usual occupation, while Rose, seated by the table, and occasionally pausing to glance down upon an open book which lay before her, listened with a smile, half of pleasure, half of amusement, as Violet, standing by her side, with a glow upon her little pale face, poured forth page after page of the *Bridal of Triermain*. Martha, too, raised her eyes now and then, with a smile of playful love in them—for little Lettie’s low-voiced intense utterance, and enthusiasm, refreshed and pleased the heart which knew so many harder sorrows than the evils of romance. Rose was Violet’s governess; in an evil hour the young teacher had bidden her pupil choose any poetry she liked for her task, and learn as much of it as pleased her. Now Violet did at that time particularly affect the minstrelsy of Sir Walter, and the result was, that already one canto of *Triermain* had been accomplished, and another, and another, remained to say.

Out of doors in the sunshine, Maggie McGillivray sung the “Learig,” and with a gay flourish of her shears accompanied the swell of the “Owerword,” as she ended every verse. At the window in the kitchen, Miss Aggie Rodger sat in a heap upon the table, and stayed her needle in mid-course, while she accomplished the Ro-o-se of A-ah-allandale; and within here the little form of Violet expanded, and her small face glowed, as her story progressed; while Rose smiled and worked, and glanced at the book; and Martha, with fresh and genuine pleasure, listened and looked on. After all, the gift of song is a fair gift to this laborious world. There was nothing very grand or elevated in either the ballads or the fable, yet enough to stir the heart, and keep the busy hands from weariness—and to do that, is to do well and merit a hearty blessing of the world.

Cuthbert was loth to disturb this pretty home scene, as he did at his entrance; but notwithstanding, Cuthbert was very well satisfied with the bright surprise and shy pleasure, which one at least of the little group displayed, and took his place among them like an old friend. Violet’s copy-book lay open on the table; and Violet made very bad pot-hooks indeed, and hated the copy intensely, though she liked the poetry.

The copy lines set for her were not very beautiful either, though they were written in a good, sensible, female hand, which had some individuality in it, and was not of the fashionable style. Such copy lines! stray lines out of books, as diverse and miscellaneous as could be collected, differing most widely from those sublime, severe, abstract propositions, which in common cases introduce the youthful student to wisdom and half-text. Cuthbert could not help a visible smile as he glanced over them.

"I have interrupted my little friend's lesson," said Charteris, as he laid down the book.

Rose was shy of him. She did not answer.

"Violet has a great appetite for verse," said Martha; "we shall have all the rest of it at night."

"Triermain." Cuthbert was a little surprised that the child should be so far advanced—innocent Cuthbert! he did not know what a host of books, of all kinds and classes, the little Violet had devoured already.

"How is Mr. Muir?" asked Cuthbert. "I heard at the office he was not at home, and I was very glad to find that he was able for travelling. Have you heard from him? How is he?"

"He is getting strong rapidly, Agnes writes," said Martha. "They are with my uncle in Ayr. We were brought up there, all of us, and so we say Harry has gone home. I hope it will strengthen him—every way," she added, with a suppressed sigh.

"And so you like Sir Walter, Violet," said Cuthbert; "come and tell me what you have read besides Triermain."

Violet came shyly to his side, and dropped her head, and answered with bashfulness, "I have read them all."

"Read them all! not quite, I think—how many books have you read, altogether?" said the puzzled Cuthbert.

Violet looked up with mingled astonishment and pity, and opened her eyes wide. She, who had already begun to look at advertisements of books; and to tease Mr. Syme, the librarian in the Cowcaddens, about new publications, which he had never heard of, and which in the ordinary course, would not reach him these hundred years—she to be asked how many books she had read! Violet was amazed at the want of apprehension, which such a question displayed.

"I have read a great heap—and I can say the Lord of the Isles, by heart, and bits of the Lady of the Lake."

Cuthbert's ignorance had given Violet a little courage: but as she met his eye, her head drooped again, and she relapsed into her former shyness.

"And how old are you, Violet?"

"I will be eleven next May." Violet had already had very grave thoughts on this subject of her age. It seemed a stupendous thing to pass that tenth milestone.

"Violet—where did you get that pretty name of yours," said Cuthbert, drawing his hand over her small dark head.

"It was my mother's name," said the little girl reverently.

The conversation came to a sudden pause. Conscious that he had a motive in asking those seeming simple questions, Cuthbert felt confused, and could not go on—so he turned to the copy-book.

"Have you written all this yourself, Violet?"

He had turned to the beginning, and there certainly was to be traced the formation of a different hand from Violet's—the respectable, womanly writing which had placed those odd copy lines on the later pages; he traced it as it improved, through a good many different steps of progress, and at the end found a clear, good-looking signature, proclaiming it to be the work of Rose A. Muir.

"Rose A. Muir," he repeated it unawares aloud.

The bearer of the name started with a slight blush. Martha glanced at him with grave scrutiny—and little Violet looking admiringly at her sister's hand-writing, explained, "Rose was called after my grandmother."

"It is not a common name," said Cuthbert, growing embarrassed under the grave eye of Martha. "May I ask, Miss Rose, what is represented by this A."

"It will be Annie or Alice, or some stupid woman's name," he said to himself, while his heart beat a little quicker.

"I was called after my grandmother, Mr. Charteris, as Lettie says," said Rose, shyly. "It is Rose Allenders—that was her name."

The young man started visibly. He had no idea of falling on anything so clear as this; but Martha looked at him with sudden curiosity, and he felt himself compelled to make some explanation.

"It is by no means a usual name, Miss Muir," said Cuthbert, turning to the elder sister. "I know something. I am slightly acquainted with a family called Allenders. Did this lady—your grandmother, Miss Rose—come from the east country?"

"I cannot tell, indeed," said Rose. "She died very long ago—before any of us were born."

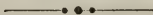
"I think they came from London," said Martha; "I have heard my uncle say so—there were two sisters of them; and their father died in Ayr. Mrs. Calder, in the old town, was very kind to the orphans, and took them in: and there the younger sister—her name was Violet—died; and my grandmother married Mrs. Calder's son. I have heard she died young too, and called her only child, who was our mother, after her little sister. It is a sad story altogether; but we heard my uncle speak of it often; and I remember how many of the old people in Ayr recollected Rose Allenders."

"My mother's name was Violet Calder," said Lettie, "but I am only plain Violet. She did not call me after all her name; but Rose has got two names because she's after my grandmother."

"I am going further west," said Cuthbert. "I shall be in Ayr for a day or two, I believe. I think I must ask you to introduce me to your uncle, Miss Muir."

"He will be glad to see you," said Martha, quietly. "But if you go now, you will find Harry established there. Give Mr. Charteris my uncle's address, Rose—but indeed you hardly need that, for every one knows my uncle."

But Cuthbert had not the least desire to meet Harry in Ayr. So he was careful to excuse himself, and suddenly discovered that he could not be able to make acquaintance with Alexander Muir, the uncle, for a full fortnight, by which time it was certain that Harry must have returned.



CHAPTER VIII.

"There is all hope in thee, sweet Spring, sweet Spring!
Dull voices, speaking of thee, unawares,
Bewray themselves to sing.
For every name thou hast such music bears;
Whether 'tis March, when all the winds are gay—
Or April, girlish in her wayward way—
Or sweetest May."

Day by day passed, of Harry Muir's last bright week at Ayr, passed no less happily to the three sisters, than to himself and his little wife—and at last, fresh, healthful, and in high spirits, the youthful couple and their baby returned home.

To walk to the coach-office to meet them, was of itself a jubilee for the home-dwellers, and Mrs. Rodger herself held the door open for them, in stately welcome. Mrs. Rodger was a tall old woman, gaunt and poverty-stricken, in her dingy widow's cap, and black cotton gown; but Mrs. Rodger had been "genteel" once, and never forgot it. She extended one of her long arms, and gave Harry's hand a swing, as he stopped to greet her. "I was just telling our weans," said Mrs. Rodger, "that the house was na like itself, wanting you—and I hope you find your leg strong, Mr. Muir; bless me, how the wee boy's grown! I would scarce have kent him; bring him ben, Violet, and let the weans get a look o' him. What a size he's turned!"

Miss Aggie, the youngest of the aforesaid weans, plunged out of the kitchen, and seized the baby with loud expressions of admiration. The little wife was easily flattered by praise of that blue-eyed boy of hers, and was by no means unwilling to accompany him herself, and exhibit him to the assembled "weans" in Mrs. Rodger's kitchen.

This apartment, which answered all purposes to the family, was a good-sized room, showing an expanse of uncovered floor, not over clean, and a great wooden "bunker" for coals, as its most noticeable feature. The "bunker" is an article which belongs exclusively to the household arrangements of Glasgow. This one was not very high as it happened, and on the corner of it sat Miss Jeanie, her hands busy with her work, her feet deposited on a chair below. Miss Aggie, in like manner, occupied a corner of the table in the window. Their work required a good deal of light, and they were fettered by no punctilios as to attitude. Miss Rodger, the eldest sister, flitted in and out of a dark scullery, and withdrawn as far as possible from the light in the dusky corner, by the fireside, sat a shabby and not very young man, with shuffling indolent limbs stretched across the hearth, and pins, the sole gathering of his idleness, stuck in the lappel of his dusty, worn coat, and a face that promised better things. This was "Johnnie," as they called him, Mrs. Rodger's only son. Poor Johnnie had begun this sad manner of life by a long illness, and now, between his rheumatism and his false shame, incapable, as it seemed, of any strenuous endeavour to make up for what he had lost, had sunk into the state of an indolent dependant upon the little earnings of his sisters. They had their faults, these women; but never one of them murmured at the burden

thus thrown upon them. Living very meanly, as they were constrained to do, they were still perfectly content to toil for Johnnie. It never seemed to occur to them at all, indeed, that the natural order of things was reversed in their case. Sometimes, it is true, there was a quarrel between the mother, who was a termagant, and the poor indolent shipwrecked son, whose temper was easily galled, having always this sore consciousness to bear it company; but never one of the sisters upbraided Johnnie, or made a merit of labouring for him. Amidst all their vanity, and vulgarity, this one feature elevated the character of the family, and gave to those three very common-place young women, a standing-ground of which no one could possibly be less conscious than they were themselves.

The large good-humoured hoyden, Miss Aggie, danced the baby in her arms, and carried him to the fireside to her brother. Poor Johnnie took the boy more gently, and praised him to his mother's heart's content, while Violet, no longer shy, but at present very fluent and talkative, stood by the side of her special friend and ally, Mr. John. The little girl and the poor indolent man, were on very intimate terms.

"I was just telling our weans," repeated Mrs. Rodger, "that the wee boy would be just another creature after a while in the country; and cheeks like roses you've gotten yoursel, Mrs. Muir. It would be unco' dull though, I'm thinking—if it had been the saut water—but it's no the season for the saut water. I mind when Archie was living—that's their father—we gaed down regular to Dunsoon, and it was just a pleasure to see the weans when they came hame."

"Agnes, Martha says the tea's ready," said Violet, "and I'm to carry little Harry ben."

The tea-table in the parlour was pleasantly covered, and still more pleasantly surrounded, and Agnes's basket, which the good uncle's own hands had packed, remained still unopened; so the baby was given over to the safe keeping of Rose, and the busy young wife began to distribute uncle Sandy's tokens of remembrance.

"This pot of honey is for you, Martha,—uncle Sandy thought you would like to give it to us all, now and then, on high days—and here is a bottle of cream from Mrs. Thompson, at the corner, and a little silk handkerchief to Rose, and the last of the apples to Violet—and see here, look, all of you, look!"

Two little flower-pots carefully packed with moss, one of

them bearing a tuft of fragrant little violets, the other proudly supporting a miniature rose-bush, with one little bud just appearing from its green leaves—good, gentle uncle! He had been at so much trouble getting this fairy rose, and cherishing it in his little sitting-room, till this solitary bud rewarded his nursing. It was hailed with a burst of delight from Violet, and by the elder sisters, with a pleasure which almost reached to tears.

“It is so like my uncle,” said Rose.

And then with some happy excitement, they gathered round the tea-table. Harry had a great budget of local news to open, and the blithe Agnes interrupted him every moment to tell of her first impressions, and new acquaintance. There had been beautiful weather, sunny and soft as it often is in the early part of April, and the young wife had left all cares behind her on the grave shoulders of Martha. Harry had been so well, so happy, so considerate—enjoying so thoroughly the simple pleasures of his old home, and the society of his pure, unsophisticated uncle—Agnes thought she had never been so happy.

And Harry’s face was sparkling with healthful, blameless pleasures. He looked so man-like, the centre of their anxieties and wishes, and was in reality so fresh-hearted, and capable of innocent enjoyment, that Martha’s troubled heart grew glad over the success of her experiment. He had been home—he had seen again in these old scenes, the pure heroic fancies of his earliest youth, and many days hence the anxious sister thought the happy effect would remain.

They closed the evening, as it was always closed in the house at Ayr, with the simple and devout worship of the family. Harry, with his fine mind so clear to-night, and happily elevated, a young household priest, conducted those simple fervent devotions—for the religious emotions were strong within him. They swayed him much sometimes, as, unfortunately other feelings swayed him at other some; but he was deeply susceptible at all times to all the beauty, all the grandeur of the holy faith he professed. The young man’s voice trembled, and his heart swelled as he appealed to the Great Father for the sake of the wonderful Son. And as, most humbly and earnestly, he asked for strength against temptation, the tears in Martha’s eyes were tears of hope—almost of joy. She thought that surely never again this young ingenuous spirit would fall—never again forsake that holy brotherhood

at whose head He stands, who was once tempted for the sake of us, to defile its garments with the mean sins of former times. There was a shadow of deep quiet upon all their faces as they rose from their knees, they thought they had come to the beginning of a purer, happier time. They, these anxious women, thought so for him; and he, poor Harry! for himself, with those joyous eyes of his, looked forward to the future without fear.

CHAPTER IX.

"I was gay as the other maidens—all the springs and hopes and youthful things of the world were like me: prithee, lady, think not I say so out of envy of your fair estate; for in good sooth, youth is estate enough for a free heart. But before youth goes, troubles come—yourself must meet them anon—and be not fearful, gentle one; for it may be they will leave rare wealth with you, and take but a little sunshine away."

OLD PLAY.

THE next day Harry entered blithely upon his old duties again. The morning was sunny and bright, and Agnes stood at the window with the baby, to watch him as he emerged from the outer door below, and turned to look up to her, and take off his hat in playful salutation. He had a little cluster of fresh spring primroses, pulled last morning in the Ayr garden, gracing his buttons-hole, and there was a spring in his step, and an elastic grace in his manner as he went away, that made glad the heart of the little wife. They were all very blithe this morning—the gladness came involuntarily from Agnes' lips in the familiar form of song, she sang to the baby—she sang to them all.

She was still a girl, this pretty wife of Harry Muir—a girl belonging to that very large class, who never discover that they have hearts at all, until they have sent them forth on some great venture, perilling all peace for ever. Agnes had been a very gay, perhaps a rather foolish girl—liking very greatly the small vanities which she could reach, and managing to keep out of sight the graver matters of life. She knew what it was to be poor—but then she had known that all her life, and the difficulties fell upon elder people, not on herself, and Agnes sailed over them with innocent heedlessness. The heart slumbered quietly in her bosom—she scarcely knew it was there, except when it beat high sometimes for some small

merry-making; scarcely even when she married Harry Muir were those gay placid waters stirred. She liked him very much—she admired him exceedingly—she was very proud of him, but still she had not found out her heart.

But when the cloud began to steal over the gay horizon of her life—when she had to watch for his coming, and tremble for his weakness, and weep over his faults those sad apologetic tears, and say, poor Harry! then this unknown existence began to make itself felt within the sobbing breast of the little, pretty, girlish wife. The sad and fatal weakness, which made him in a certain degree dependent upon them—which aroused the feelings of anxious care, the eager expedients to protect him from himself, gave a new character to Agnes. In sad peril now was the happiness of this young, tender, sensitive heart; but the danger that threatened it had quickened it into conscious life.

He went away with smiles, and hopeful freshness to his daily labour. He came home, honestly wearied, at an earlier hour than usual, having his conscience free of offence that day. So happily they all gathered about the little tea-table; so gaily Agnes presided at its tea-making, and Martha placed on the table the little crystal vessel full of honey—odorous honey, breathing out stories of all the home flowers of Ayr—so much the travellers have still to tell, and the dwellers at home to hear.

“And now, Martha,” said Harry, “put on your bonnet, and come out. I believe she has never been out, Agnes, all the time we have been away.”

“Yes, indeed, Harry—Martha was always at the Kirk,” said the literal Violet.

“But we are not going to the Kirk to-morrow—come Martha, and taste this April air.”

Martha looked at her work. “It is a temptation Harry; but I think you had better take Rose—see, Rose looks white with working so long, and I have to go to the warehouse.”

“To the Candleriggo!” said Harry, laughing. “Where you scarcely can tell when it is June and when December; and if Rose is white, you are absolutely green with sitting shut up here so long—come Martha.”

It was not very complimentary, but the pallid faded cheek of Martha actually bore to eyes which had been in the sunshine, a tinge of that undesirable hue. Save for the beneficent rest of the Sabbath-day, and the walk through the hushed

streets to church, Martha had indeed, since her brother went to Ayr, never been out of doors. The luxury of sending Harry to the pure home atmosphere was not a cheap one. She had been labouring for, while he enjoyed it.

"But what if Mr. Charteris comes?" said Rose, with a little shyness: no one else seemed to remember that Mr. Charteris was to come.

"We will not stay long," said Harry; "you must keep him till we return."

Rose seemed half inclined to go too; but she remembered how often Martha had sent her out to enjoy the walk which she had denied herself; and there were a great many "holes," as those very prosaic sempstresses called the little spaces in the centres of embroidered flowers, at which they worked, to be finished before they were returned to the warehouse to-morrow—so even at the risk of a little additional conversation with the formidable Mr. Charteris, Rose made up her mind to stay.

And Martha and Harry went out alone. They were not within reach of any very pleasant place for walking, but they struck off through some of those unsettled transitional fields which hang about the outskirts of great towns, to the side of the canal. Those soft spring evenings throw a charm over the common-place atmosphere of even such ordinary haunts as this—and it is wonderful indeed, when one's eyes and heart are in proper trim, how the great sky itself alone, and the vast world of common air, in which we breathe, and through which human sounds come to us, can suffice to refresh our minds. Nature is beautiful in every place.

The distant traffic of the "Port," to which this canal is the sea; the flutter of dingy sloop sails, and a far-off prospect of the bare cordage, and brief masts of little Dutch vessels, delivering their miscellaneous cargoes there, gave a softened home look, almost like the quiet harbour of some little seaport, to a scene which close at hand could boast of few advantages. But the air was bright with the haze of sunset, and in the east the sky had paled down to the exceeding calmness of the eventide, lying silently around its lengthened strips of island cloud like an enchanted sea. Dull and blank was the long level line of water at their feet, yet it was water still, and flowed, or seemed to flow; and along the bank came the steady tramp of those strong horses, led by a noisy cavalier whose accoutrements clanked and jingled like a steam-engine.

piloting the gaily-painted "Swift" boat from Edinburgh, with its crowds of impatient passengers to the end of their tedious journey. These were homely sights—but the charmed atmosphere gave a harmony to them all.

And there were some trees upon this side of the canal—and grass as green as though it lived a country life, and stout weeds, rank and vigorous by the side of the way—and the hum of the great town came softly on their ear, with here and there a distant sound breaking the inarticulate hum of that mass of busy life. Better than all these, there was such perfect confidence between the brother and sister, as had scarcely been before, since he was the unstained boy, innocent and ignorant, and she the eager teacher, putting forth a second time in this young untried vessel, the solemn venture of her hopes. It was not that Harry had anything to confide to the anxious heart, which noted all his thoughts and modes of feeling so narrowly; but the little daily things which sometimes have so weighty a bearing upon the most important matters of life; the passing fancies, the very turns of expression which show the prevailing tone of the speaker's mind, were so frankly visible to the eye of the watchful sister, that Martha's heart rejoiced within her with solemn joy.

Meanwhile, Rose sat alone in the parlour doing her work, somewhat nervously, and hoping fervently that Mr. Charteris would not come till "somebody was in" to receive him.

The baby lay sound asleep in the cradle. Agnes had gone down to Mrs. McGarvie to negotiate about some washing, and was at this moment standing in Mrs. McGarvie's kitchen, near the small table where Mrs. McGarvie herself, with the kettle in one hand, and a great horn spoon in the other, was pouring a stream of boiling water into a bowl half filled with the beautiful yellow pease-meal, which keeps the stomachs of Glasgow in such superlative order, compounding the same into brose, for the supper of Rab, who newly come in, had just removed his blue bonnet from his shaggy red head in honour of his mother's visitor. Mrs. McGarvie had undertaken the washing, and Agnes in her overflowing happy spirits, was telling her about the journey, from which they had just returned.

Violet, last of all, was in Mrs. Rodgers's "big room," a very spacious, fine apartment, which was generally occupied by some lodger. They had no tenant for it at present, and were this evening entertaining a party in the large, lofty, shabbily-

furnished dining room. Violet had gone in among these guests with the natural curiosity of a child, and poor Rose, nervously apprehensive of the coming of this formidable Mr. Charteris, sat in the parlour alone.

Her busy fingers began to flag as she filled up these "holes;" and now and then, the work dropped on her knee. The ordinary apprehensions about Harry, which generally formed the central object of her thoughts, were pleasantly hushed to-night. Rose was not thinking about anything particular—she would have said so, at least—but for all that, long trains of indefinite fancies were flitting through her mind, and her thick blunt needle was altogether stayed now and then—only recovering in hysteric bursts its ordinary movements, when Rose trembled to fancy that she heard a step on the stair. If Agnes would only come in—if Harry and Martha were but home again!

At last a step was heard on the stair in reality. "May be it is Agnes," said Rose to herself as her needle began to fly again through the muslin—but it was not only Agnes, it was the foot of a man—poor Rose wondered if by any possibility she could run away.

And there he was, this sad ogre whom Rose feared, quietly opening the parlour door, as if he had some right to be there. Mr. Charteris was almost as shy as Rose herself. He sat down with pleased embarrassment, and looked exceedingly awkward, and spoke by no means so sensibly as he was used to do. Rose eagerly explained the reason why she was alone, and went to the window in haste to look for Agnes.

Mr. Charteris' eye had been caught by something of a very faded neutral hue, in a black frame, which hung above the mantelpiece. He asked Miss Rose if it was embroidery.

Miss Rose was moved to laughter, and her laugh dispersed the mist of shyness very pleasantly. "It is only an old sampler of my grandmother's, Mr. Charteris."

Mr. Charteris rose to look at it.

"There is not much art in it," said Rose, "it seems that all the landscapes on samplers are of one style—but my mother gave it to me when I was a girl—a little girl—and I used to be proud of it, because it was my own."

Mr. Charteris took it down to examine its beauties more closely. It bore the name of the artist at full length, "Rose Allenders," and had a square house, and some very original trees, like the trees of very old paintings, elaborately worked upon it.

"I think you said she had been long dead," said Cuthbert.

"Long ago—very long ago," said Rose. "When my mother was only a child, my grandmother died. Her name is on the stone, among the rest of the Calders, and her father and her little sister are near her, in the churchyard. Uncle Sandy used to take us there when we were children. I believe he thought they would feel lonely in their very graves, because they lay among strangers."

There was a pause. Cuthbert again hung up the faded sampler, and Rose worked most industriously at her opening. Each was earnestly endeavouring to invent something to say—and both of them were singularly unsuccessful. It was the greatest possible relief to Rose to hear Harry's voice in the passage.

The two young men greeted each other heartily—it seemed that there was some charm in these very faults of poor Harry—for everybody learned to like and apologise for, even while they blamed him.

"And so you are going to Ayr," said Harry, "why did you not come a little earlier, Mr. Charteris, that I might have shown our town to you? You will not appreciate the beauties it has, unless some one native to it, points them out."

"For which cause I am here to seek an introduction which Miss Muir promised me to your uncle," said Cuthbert.

"To my uncle? are you a character hunter, Mr. Charteris?" said Harry quickly, and with something which Rose thought looked like rudeness.

"No, I don't think so—but why do you ask me?"

"Because the vulgar call my uncle a character and an original," said Harry. "I thought your cousin, who saw him once, might have told you so,—and he does not like the imputation. We are jealous of my uncle's feelings, as we have a good right to be, for he has been a father, and teacher, and companion alike to all of us."

"I had some business in the neighbourhood of Ayr," said Cuthbert, with a little conscious embarrassment—"one of those things in our profession that border upon the romantic,—there are not many of them, Miss Rose; I want to trace out some links of descent—to find some lost members of an old family. I shall find them only by means of gravestones I apprehend, but that will answer my purpose. It is not quite in my department, this kind of business; but it is pleasant to have some excuse for seeing so fine a country in this time

when 'folk are longen to go on pilgrimages,'—I think you must begin to feel this longing, Miss Muir?"

"It is wonderful how easily one can content oneself," said Martha, with a smile which spoke of singular peace. "We have only to shut our eyes, Rose and I, and straightway we are at home, or to send some one else to enjoy it, Mr. Charteris. Harry and Agnes, have brought us so much of the atmosphere that I scarcely desire it now for myself."

CHAPTER X.

"Ay, even here, in the close city streets,
 'Tis good to see the sunset—how the light,
 Curious and scornful, thrusts away the masses
 Of vapour brooding o'er the busy town,
 Yet leaves a trace of rosy light the while
 Even on the thing it scorns.
 And the rich air gives sweetness to all sounds;
 And hazy sunbeams glorify young faces—
 And labour turns aside, glad of its hour
 Of aimless idling."

CUTHBERT CHARTERIS, much against his will, was detained a week longer in Glasgow. His uncle, a man of unbounded hospitality, an almost invariable characteristic of his class, was not without a little family pride in Cuthbert's attainments and position—and such a succession of people had been already invited to "meet" Mr. Buchanan's advocate nephew, that Cuthbert's good humour, though already sufficiently taxed, would not suffer him to disappoint them.—Nether was it until the very last evening of the week, when he had made positive arrangements for going to Ayr next day, that he had leisure to call on the Muirs.

The sun was setting on the soft April evening, and the slanting level sunbeams streamed through the dusty streets, drawing out in long shadows the outline of the houses. Within these shadows the bystanders felt almost the chill of winter, while in the sunshine at the street corners, lounging groups congratulated each other that summer had come at last.

Here the light fell on a white "mutch" or two, and on the sun-burnt heads of innumerable children of whose boisterous play the gossip mothers took no notice.—There it glimmered and sparkled in braids and curls, and plaits of beautiful hair

which a *coiffeur* might have studied for the benefit of his art, and which you could scarcely fancy the short thick toil-hardened fingers of these laughing mill-girls able to produce. But toilsome as their factory life was, it had its edge of enjoyment, quite as bright and enlivening as the evening recreations of any other *class*—and with those young engineer workmen clustering around them, and the evening sunshine and the hum of continual sound—sound which expressed repose and sport, and scarcely had the least admixture of the laborious din of full day—filling the atmosphere, there were many scenes less pleasant and less graceful, than the street corner and its groups of mill-girls. And here, up the broad road, now almost free of the carts which usually crowd it, dashes at full speed a bright little equipage glowing in green and gold, which draws up with a flourish at the corner. Straightway the “close mouths,” and “common stairs” pour forth a stream of girls and women, carrying vessels of every form and size, from the small china cream-jug from some lonely lady’s teatable to the great pitcher under which little Mary staggers as she carries it home in her arms to supply the porridge of a dozen brothers and sisters; and you never were refreshed with richer milk under the deepest umbrage of summer trees, than that which gives forth its balmy streams from the pretty green barrels hooped with brilliant brass, which rest upon the light framework of the Port Dundas dairy cart.

Rose Muir stood at the door as Cuthbert approached—he had chosen a later hour than usual for his visit, that he might not disturb them at their simple evening meal—but as he glanced at the downcast face of Rose, over which an uneasy colour was flushing, he saw that the old anxiety, the origin of which he had guessed at before, had now again returned. The long wistful glances she cast along the street—the eager expectant look with which she turned to himself—once before the herald of poor Harry—would have almost sufficed to reveal the secret of the family to Cuthbert had he not guessed it before.

“Harry has not come home yet,” said Rose, with an unconscious apology in her tone; “they are sometimes kept very late at the office—but my sisters are up stairs, Mr. Charteris, will you come in?”

Cuthbert followed her silently. He had become so much interested in the fortunes of the family, that he felt his own

heart sink, as he remembered that "the office" had been closed a full hour ago.

Agnes was alone when they entered the parlour, and Cuthbert, roused to observation, saw her sudden start as they opened the door, and the pallor and sickness of disappointment which came over her pretty youthful face, when her eye fell upon himself. The work she had been busy with, fell from the fingers which seemed for the moment too nervous to hold it. The little wife had been so confident—so sure of Harry's reformation,—and her heart was throbbing now with a positive agony of mingled fear and hope.

Cuthbert seated himself on the sofa, and began to talk of the baby—it was almost the only subject which could soothe the young mother—but even while he spoke, he could see how nervously awake they both were to every sound; how Rose suspended her work and held her breath at every footstep in the street below which seemed to approach the door—and how the needle stumbled in the small fingers of Agnes, and the unusual colour flickered on her cheek.

"You are very late, Harry," said Martha, entering from the inner room—Cuthbert's back was towards her—she thought it was her brother.

"It is Mr. Charteris, Martha," said Rose.

There was a fiery light in Martha's eyes—an impatience almost fierce in the evident pang and short suppressed exclamation with which she discovered her mistake. She too had been strong in her renewed hope—had begun to rest with a kind of confidence in the changed mind of Harry.

But now the former chafing had commenced again, and the bitter hopelessness which once before overpowered her, returned upon her heart—Cuthbert thought of the old grand picture of the bound Prometheus—of the lurid background, and the cold tints of the captive figure, rigid in his manacled strength, with the vulture at his heart. Bitterest of dooms, to be bound to this misery, without one free hand to struggle against it.

But Martha took her seat in silence, and a conversation was very languidly carried on. Insensibly Cuthbert felt the same anxiety steal over himself—he felt that he *ought* to go away, but yet he remained. By degrees the conversation dwindled into broken remarks from himself, and faltering responses from Rose and Agnes; sometimes indeed Martha spoke, but her words were harsh and bitter, or else full of a

conscious mockery of light-heartedness, which was more painful still.

The tea-tray with its homely accompaniments stood on the table—the little kettle sang by the side of the old-fashioned grate—but the night was now far advanced and reluctant to shut out the lingering remains of daylight, the sisters had laid aside their work; it was almost dark and still Harry had not come.

“Where is Violet, Agnes?” said Martha after a long silence.

“She went out to play,” said the little wife. “Some of her friends were down here, and they wanted her. I could not keep Lettie in, Martha, on so fine a night.”

“I was angry at the poor bairn,” said Martha, with a singular humility, “I did wrong. I will go myself and look for her—our troubles are not so few that we should make additions to them of our own will.”

There was a strange pathos in the low tone in which Martha spoke, and in the sudden melting of the strained vehement heart. Cuthbert saw the trembling hand of Agnes steal up to her eyes, and heard the appealing deprecatory whisper of Rose, “Oh Martha!” He could see its meaning—he could hear in it an echo of that other exclamation—poor Harry! so common in this house.

Little Violet had been at play in the street below, carrying the vague blank grief of childhood into her very sport. As Martha rose, the little girl suddenly burst into the room. “Agnes, Harry’s coming.”

They were all very quiet—a sort of hush of deep apprehension came upon the sisters, and Rose went out hastily to the door.

In another moment, Harry had entered the room—looking very pale, and with an unmeaning smile upon his face. He came forward with great demonstration to greet Charteris, and hurried over an elaborate account of things which had detained him—the strangest complication of causes, such as came in no one’s way but his.

“Why don’t you light the candles?” said poor Harry, with an ostentatious endeavour at high spirits. “Have you been sitting in the dark like so many crows? Rosie, quick light this, and get another candle. You don’t think we can see with one, and Mr. Charteris here. Have you not got tea yet, Agnes? Nonsense, what made you wait for me? I can’t

always be home at your hours, you know—when a man hasn't his time at his own disposal, you know, Mr. Charteris—what is it now?—what do you want, Lettie?"

The solitary candle had been lighted, and placed on the table. It threw a painful illumination upon Harry's perfectly colourless face, as he stood in the middle of the room, with an unsteady swing in his movements. Agnes had left the arm-chair to him, but still he stood by the table—while Rose, with a paleness almost as great as his upon her face, went about painfully arranging things that needed no arrangement, and Martha sat rigid in her chair.

"I say, what is it, Lettie?" repeated Harry.

"Nothing, Harry—only you've torn your coat," said Violet.

She showed it to him—some one had seized his skirt apparently to detain him, and a great rent was visible. It brought a sudden flush to the damp face of poor Harry, but the flush was of defiance and anger. He struck Violet with his open hand, and exclaimed impatiently, "Get away, what business have *you* with that?"

It was a very slight blow—and Violet shrank away in silence out of the room; but a deep red burning colour flushed over Martha's faded face, and with a quick impulsive start she rose from her chair.

"Harry!" Her harsh hoarse voice seemed to sober the unhappy lad. He looked round him for a moment on those other pale faces, and on the grieved and embarrassed Cuthbert, with the defiant stare which he had tried to maintain before; but as his eyes turned to Martha, and to the deep and painful colour of shame and anguish on her face, poor Harry's courage fell. He did not speak—he glided into the vacant chair, and suddenly abandoning his poor design of concealment covered his face with his hands.

"Harry is not well—he is not strong, poor fellow," said Agnes, almost sobbing, "get a cup of tea for him, Rose. Martha, sit down."

Martha obeyed mechanically. There was a struggle in the face of poor Harry's passionate sister. The fierce impatience of her anger seemed melting away—melting into that utter despondency and hopelessness—that deep humiliation, which with the second sight that sometimes adds new pangs to sorrow, saw that to hope was useless, and yet in the depths did only cling the closer to this impossible hope. Poor

Harry! Martha was not given to weeping, but then she could have wept such desperate burning tears, as only come out of the depths.

Cuthbert felt that if he had helped to increase their pain by being a spectator of this scene, he would but add to it by hastening immediately away.

"I shall have a long walk," he said, with forced ease, "and I think I must now crave your last message for Ayr, Miss Muir. What am I to say to your uncle?"

"That you left us—nay," said Martha, restraining herself with a great effort, and glancing over to Harry with a strange yearning look of grief, "say little to the old man, Mr. Charteris. He knows how he would wish us to be in his own gentle heart—and it is best to leave it so; say we were well—and now we must not detain you. Harry, have you anything to say to my uncle?"

Poor Harry uncovered his white, unhappy face. "I?—nothing—nothing—you know I have nothing to say—good-bye, Mr. Charteris."

"It is so short a time since we left Ayr," said Agnes, offering Cuthbert her trembling hand.

And then he left the room.

The lobby was quite dark. Cuthbert fancied he heard some sound like a suppressed sob as Rose stole out after him, and closed the parlour door. It was Violet sitting in gloom and solitude on the ground, with her little desolate heart well nigh bursting. Martha had been displeased at her. Harry had struck her—and fearful dreams of being utterly alone, and having no one in the world to care for her, were passing drearily through Violet's mind. That sad dumb anguish of the child, which we do not seem ever to remember when we have children to deal with, weighed down the young spirit to the very dust. She thought, poor solitary girl, miserable proud thoughts of dying, and leaving them to grieve for her when she was dead, who would not care for her enough when she was living—and she thought, too, of toiling on alone to the vague greatness which children dream of, and shutting up her heart in her solitary course, from those who had chilled and rejected it so early. Poor little dreaming inconsistent poetic child, who in an hour could be bright as the sunshine again—but while it lasted there were few things in elder life so bitter as that childish pain.

Rose lifted her up and followed Charteris to the door, hold-

ing the weeping and reluctant Violet within her arm. "Mr. Charteris," said Rose eagerly, "do not say anything to my uncle about—. I mean, will you just tell him we are well, and not say that anything ails Harry? Will you, Mr. Charteris?"

Cuthbert did not quite know what he answered, neither did Rose; but whatever it was it cheered her; and as he went away, the youthful woman lingered in the darkness, stooping over the child. Rose had reached a further stage than Violet in this grave journey of life; and if she knew more fully the absolute causes of the family affliction, she had outgrown the indefinite gloom and terror. Other thoughts, too, came in to lighten, in some degree, the heaviness of her own heart, as she soothed and consoled her little sister. Harry hitherto had been constantly the central object in her mind—the dearest always, and in his brightest times the best—perhaps only the more endeared for all his weakness; but now there began to dawn upon Rose a stronger, purer, higher ideal. Stealthy and tremulous the thought glided into her mind; a higher excellence than poor Harry's—a fairer fate than that of Harry's sister. She put it away as if it had been guilt; but still it had looked in upon her, and left a trace of secret sunshine behind.

Thus they were, the child and the girl—Violet already cheered by the gentle voice of Rose, and Rose lightened with the fair fantastic light of her own thick-coming fancies. Neither forgot the sorrow which was parted from them only by these slight walls—neither yet could stay their involuntary tears—and the elder heart overflowed with pity and tenderness for poor Harry; but yet there were others than Harry in the world for both.

Within that little room it was far otherwise. He was sitting there still, his clasped hands covering his face, and the cup of tea, which Agnes had poured out for him, standing untasted on the table. No one else had thought of beginning this joyless meal. Agnes sat near him, leaning her arm upon his chair, touching his shoulder sometimes, and murmuring, "Harry;" but he had not lifted his head. Opposite him, Martha sat very still, her eyes wandering about, her fingers convulsively clasped, her features moving. Sometimes she started suddenly, as if she could have dashed that aching brow of hers against the wall; sometimes a low unconscious moan escaped from her lips; and when, after wandering round

the room, noting the little well-known peculiarities of its furniture, as people only do in their bitterest moments, her eyes turned to Harry lying motionless in his chair, with the damp hair clustering upon his brow, and his hands hiding his face, the anger and passion fled away from her brow like shadows. Poor Harry! in his weakness, in his sin—only so much the more her own—not the strong man now, for whom she had woven dreams of fond and proud ambition—but ever and always the dependent boy, the child she tended long ago—the unhappy lad over whom her heart yearned now as a mother. Martha rose—the tears came out from under her dry eyelids—a sad smile dawned upon the stern harsh features of her face. She laid her hand upon his shoulder.

“Harry, Harry, is it worth all this misery? We have nothing but you—no hope in this world but you. Will you take it from us, Harry? Will you make us desolate?”

The little wife looked up through her tears, begging forbearance. Poor Harry himself lifted his head, and grasped the hands she held out to him. “Never again—never again.”

Her tears fell upon the clasped hands, and so did his. “Never again.” Violet crept to his side, and softly laid her little hand upon his arm. Agnes, weeping quietly, rested her head upon his shoulder, almost happy again in the reconciliation; and Rose stood behind his chair.

Poor Harry! They all heard his vow; they all tried to take up their hope, and once more look fearlessly on the future. No one believed more devoutly than he did himself that now he could not fall again. No one was so confident as he that this sin was his last: “Never again.” Heavy, unseen tears flowed from under Martha’s closed eyelids that night, when all the rest were peacefully asleep—poor Harry first of all. Never again! The words moved her to anything but hope. Poor Harry!

CHAPTER XI.

“ Winter hath many days most like to Spring;
Soft thawing winds, and rains like dew, and gleams
Of sweet inconstant sunshine.—I have seen
An old man's heart that ne'er was done with seedtime,
Abiding in its gracious youth for ever.”

THE next morning very early, while Martha Muir, unable to rest, sat at the window, carefully mending the torn coat which was poor Harry's only one, Cuthbert Charteris set out on the top of the coach for Ayr. What he had seen on the previous night oppressed him heavily, weighing down even the natural exhilaration which the morning sunshine usually brought to a mind void of offence towards men, and walking by faith humbly with God. Continually that scene rose up before him—the hidden tears and trembling of Agnes and Rose—the stern agitation of Martha—the fatuous smile upon poor Harry's white conscious face. “Poor Harry!” the stranger echoed with emotion, the sad tenderness of this lamentation so familiar to Harry's nearest friends.

Harry, meanwhile, was peacefully asleep, unconscious of the hopeless musing of his sister, as she sat by the window not long after sunrise, doing this sad piece of work for him, and of the gloom which he cast over the happier mind of his friend; a common case—almost too common to need recording.

It was the afternoon before Charteris left his inn to seek the house of Alexander Muir. In the intermediate time he had been wandering about the town, and hunting through one old churchyard which lay in his way for the graves of the Allenders; but his search was not successful. The afternoon was bright and warm, the month being now far advanced, and he was directed easily to the residence of the old man whom everybody seemed to know. It was in one of the quiet back streets of the town, a narrow-causewayed lane, kept in a kind of constant twilight by the shadows of tall houses. The house he sought was not tall—a low door opened immediately from the rough stones of the street; and on either side was a square window fortified with strong panes of greenish glass, which gave a hue by no means delightful to the little checked-muslin

blinds within. The upper story was a separate house, and had an outside stair ascending to it, which stair darkened the lower door, and served as a sort of porch, supported on the further side by a rude pillar of mason-work. Cuthbert thought it a very dim dusky habitation for the gentle uncle of the Muirs.

A little maid-servant, with a striped red and black woollen petticoat and "short gown" of bright printed cotton, opened the door for him. Descending a single step, Cuthbert entered a narrow passage at the end of which was another open door, with a bright prospect of trees, and flowers, and sunshine beyond. The lobby was paved with brick, very red and clean, which the little servant seemed just to have finished scouring; and an open door on one side of it gave him a glimpse of a trim bed-chamber, with flowers on its little dressing-table; on the other side was another door (closed) of another bed-room; and, looking to the garden, the kitchen and the little parlour occupied the further side of the house.

"Will ye just gang in, sir," said the girl, removing her pail out of Cuthbert's way; "ye'll get him in the garden himsel."

Cuthbert obeyed, and passed by himself to the other door.

A very singular scene awaited him there. The garden was a large one, and formed the greatest possible contrast to the dusky front of the house. Apple-trees in full blossom, and a bright congregation of all the flowers of spring, surrounded the more homely produce in which the large enclosure seemed rich. The door was matted round with climbing plants, roses, and honey-suckles, which, in a month or two, would be as bright and fragrant as now they were green; and a splendid pear-tree, flushed with blossom, covered one entire side of the house.

But the animate parts of the picture were still more remarkable—scattered through the garden in groups, but principally here near the door where some fine trees sheltered, and the sun shone upon them, were a number of girls, from fourteen to twenty, working the Ayrshire work as it is called—to wit, the fine embroideries on muslin, which the Muirs "opened"—and talking, as girls generally talk, very happily and gaily—with snatches of song, and pleasant laughter. They had all the average good looks, and were dressed becomingly as girls in their class, who maintain themselves by needlework, generally are. Completely astonished at first, Cuthbert became amused and interested in the scene as he stood a moment unperceived

at the door, especially when, through the embowering leaves, he caught a glimpse of the person he had come to see.

He was a little spare man, with hair nearly white, and a hale, ruddy cheek. Seated in an arm-chair, in front of his parlour window, with a book in his hand, it was very evident that the good man's book had very little share of his attention. At present he was telling a story to his audience; and Cuthbert admired the natural eloquence, the simple grace of language, in which he clothed it. His speech was quite Scottish, and even a little provincial, but untainted with the least mixture of vulgarity; and when he had rounded his tale with a quotation from Burns, he opened the book in which he had been keeping his place with his finger, only to close it again immediately, when a new demand was made upon his attention.

"Eh, Mr. Muir," said one of the girls, "what for have ye such lots of horse-gowans yonder in the corner?"

"They're no horse-gowans, Beatie, my woman—they're camomile," said the old man.

"And what's it for? is it for eating?" asked the curious Beatie.

"It's for making drinks for no weel folk," volunteered a better-informed companion.

"It's for selling to John Wilson, the man that has taken up physic at his own hand," said the chairman of this strange assembly. "They tell me he's a friend of Dr. Hornbook's; you've all heard of Dr. Hornbook in Burns."

There was a general assent; but some, among whom was the Beatie aforesaid, looked wistful and curious, and had not heard of that eminent personage.

"It's a profane thing, a profane thing," said Alexander Muir. "Keep to the cotter, like good bairns. Ye'll get no ill out of it. But what ails ye, Beatie, my woman?"

"Eh, sirs," it's a gentleman," said Beatie, under her breath. Whereupon there ensued a dead silence, and a fit of spasmodic industry came upon the girls, occasionally interrupted by a smothered titter, as one of the more mischievous, who sat with her back to the door, tempted to laughter her companions, whose downcast faces were towards the stranger.

Cuthbert introduced himself in a few words, and was heartily greeted by the old man. "I have an obligation to you, sir, as well as the rest of them for your care of Harry," said the uncle; "and ye left them well? they are my family,

these bairns, an old solitary man as I am, and their friends are most welcome to me."

"You seem to have another family round you here," said Cuthbert, looking with a smile on the demure group before him, some of whom were painfully suppressing the laugh which they could not altogether conceal.

"Neighbours' bairns," said Alexander Muir; "bits of innocent things that have not the freedom of a garden like mine at home. There is a kind of natural kin between them and the spring. I like to see them among my flowers, and I think their work gets on all the better, that they are cheery in the doing of it; but to tell you the truth, I cannot see, Mr. Charteris, how one's own bairns should think themselves better in Glasgow than with me, now that Harry has gotten a wife."

"They wish to remain together, I fancy," said Cuthbert, sadly remembering the bitter tie which kept them beside poor Harry; "but both for health and happiness, Mr. Muir, I should fancy they would be better with you."

"Say you so?" said the old man, eagerly, "for happiness; aye, say you so?"

Cuthbert hastened to explain away, so far as he could, the painful meaning of his words, leaving it to be inferred that it was only the fresh air and freedom of this pleasant place of which they stood in need.

"I am going in for a while with this gentleman," said uncle Sandy, raising his voice as he turned to his little congregation; "but mind there is no need for your turning idle because I am not here to look after you; mind and be eident, as the cotter's bairns were bidden to be."

The girls acknowledged the smiling speech addressed to them by a great demonstration of industry; and for a few minutes the blue stamped leaves and branches of their muslin grew into white embroidery with wonderful speed. The old man looked round upon them with a smile as they sat bending down their heads under the glistening sunshine over their pretty work, and then, laying his book in his chair, he led the way into the house.

The parlour was a very small one, considerably less than the best bed-room, which occupied the front of the house, and which, by an occupant of less poetic taste, would have been made the sitting-room. But Alexander Muir did not like the dull prospect of the little back street; he preferred to look out upon the garden in which so much of his time was spent; and

the little room was large enough for all his quiet necessities.

His old easy chair had been removed from the fireside corner to the window. It was a latticed window, furnished with a broad shelf extending all the length of its deep recess, which seemed to have been made for plants, but no plants interposed themselves between the sunshine and the books, which were the best beloved companions of the old, gentle, solitary man. Cuthbert looked at them as they lay in little heaps in the corner of the window. There was no dust about them, but almost as little arrangement. They lay, as their contents lay in the head of their good master, mingled in pleasant friendliness. The *Fourfold State* and the *Crook in the Lot* embraced the royal sides of Shakspeare, and a much-used copy of Burns lay peacefully beside the Milton, which, to tell the truth, opened more easily at *Comus* or at *Il Penseroso* than in either *Paradise*. Besides these, there were Cowper and Young, an odd volume of the *Spectator*, an old time-worn copy of the *Pilgrim*, with Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*, and Fleming, the interpreter of prophecy, and the quaint Willison ballasting some volumes of Scott and Galt. Daily friends and comrades were these, bearing marks of long and frequent use, some of them encased in homely covers of green cloth, which the old man's own careful hands had covered them with; some half bound, after his fashion, with stripes of uncultivated "calf" defending their backs, and their boards gay with marbled paper. It was pleasant to see them in their disarrangement upon the broad ledge of the window—friends too intimate and familiar to be kept on ceremonious terms.

"Take a seat, Mr. Charteris," said uncle Sandy; "if you had come while Harry was here it might have been pleasanter for you, for Harry, poor man, is a blithe companion; maybe over blithe sometimes for his own well-doing. And you think the bairns would be better with me?"

"Nay," said Charteris, hastily, "except in so far as this house of yours, Mr. Muir, is certainly a most pleasant contrast to the din and haste of Glasgow, and your nieces, you know, like your young friends yonder, are akin to spring."

The old man had seated himself in his easy chair, which Cuthbert would not take. He took off his spectacles to wipe them with his handkerchief, and shook his head. "There is Rose, to be sure, and little Lettie; but my niece, Martha, Mr. Charteris—well, I cannot tell—the spring may come to

her yet after the summer has passed. I would not put the bondage of common use about Martha, for the like of me is little able to judge the like of her. It is a hard thing to understand. It might have been a question in the days of the auld philosophy, what for the mind that would have served a conqueror should be put into her—a mind that can ill bow to the present yoke, when there is even too much need of such in high places. It will be clear enough some time, but it has aye been a wonder to me.”

“There may be difficulties in her way to conquer, more hopeless than kingdoms,” said Cuthbert, involuntarily.

“Young man, do you ken of any evil tidings?” asked Alexander Muir, with sudden haste and energy.

“Nothing, nothing,” said Cuthbert, annoyed at himself for speaking words from which inferences so painful could be drawn. “You must hear my special mission to Ayr, Mr. Muir. Your niece has told me that the name of her grandmother was Allenders; it is an unusual name. Could you give me any information about the family?”

The old man looked considerably surprised. “They were strangers here,” he said; “I mind of Mrs. Calder very well, whose daughter Violet married James Muir, my brother. He was ten years younger than me, and so I mind of his good mother, though she died long ago. They came from London, Mr. Charteris. There was a father and two daughters in the family. I will let you see all that remains of them—their grave.”

“And are there no papers—no way of tracing the family to their origin?” said Cuthbert, with some uneasiness.

“We have never thought it of any importance,” said the old man, smiling; “if it is, we may fall on some means maybe. It sharpens folk’s wits to have something to find out—but what depends on it, Mr. Charteris?”

“I have said nothing of it to our friends in Glasgow—fearing that the name might have misled me,” said Cuthbert; “but there is, I am glad to tell you, an estate depending upon it—not a great one, Mr. Muir—a comfortable small estate producing some four hundred pounds a-year.”

Cuthbert wanted to be rather under than over the mark—four hundred pounds a-year! the sum was princely and magnificent to the astonished old man. He looked at Cuthbert in a mist of bewilderment. He took off his spectacles and wiped their glasses again. He put up his hand to his head,

and rubbed his forehead in confused amazement. "Four hundred pounds a-year!"

"So far as I have gone yet, it seems almost certain that your nephew is the heir," said Cuthbert. "The surname of itself is much, and the Christian names confirm its evidence very strongly. If you think there can be anything done to trace the origin of these Allenders, I should be glad to proceed to it at once."

The old man had bowed down his head—he was fumbling now with nerveless fingers at his glasses, and suddenly he raised the handkerchief with which he had been wiping them, up to his eyes. Some sounds Cuthbert heard like one or two broken irrepressible sobs, "For Harry—for the unstable calant—the Lord's grace to save him from temptation—that I should live to see this hope!"

The short, broken sobs continued for a moment, and then he raised his head. "I see, sir," said the old man, with natural dignity, "that to thank you for troubling yourself in this way with the humble concerns of these orphans, who can render you little in return, would be to hold you in less esteem than is your due. I take your service, as, if I had been as young and well endowed as you, I think I could maybe have rendered it—and now tell me what it is you want to discover, that I may further it, if I can, without delay."



CHAPTER XII.

"What! mine own boy?"

ALMOST in Lindsay's words, Cuthbert told to the old man the story of the Allenders. He listened without making any remark, but evidently, as Cuthbert saw, with great attention.

"John Allenders—yes, that was the name," he said, when his visitor had concluded. "And Violet and Rose—it looks like—very like, as if these bairns were the folk you seek. I pray heaven they may; no for the siller," continued the old man, turning back on his way to the pin where hung his low, broad-brimmed hat: "no alone or even specially for the siller; but for other matters, Mr. Charteris, other things of more

concern to Martha and me, and the rest of them, too, poor things, than silver and gold; though no doubt an honourable maintenance, no to say a grand independence like that, is to be thankfully received for itself, if we would not sin against our mercies—and now, sir, I am ready.”

Charteris followed without any question.

The old man turned first to the garden door, and looked out. His young guests had slackened a little in their industry; one of them sat solemnly in the arm-chair, reading with great emphasis from the book he had left. Another had thrown down her work to arrange in elaborate braids a favourite companion's hair; and two or three other groups, with their heads close together, were discussing “the gentleman;” and what could possibly be his errand with Maister *Meur*. “Bairns,” said the old man, looking out smilingly. With a sudden start the girls resumed their work, the occupant of the arm-chair threw down the book in great haste, and fled to her own seat.

“The book will do ye no harm; ye may read it out loud, one at a time,” said the gracious patron of the young embroiderers; “but see that you do not forget what work must be done, or make me forsworn of my word, when I promised to see ye keep from idleness. Mind! or we will cast out the morn.”

Saying which, the old man turned to the street door, directing his little Jessie as he passed the kitchen, to have tea prepared with some ornamental additions to its ordinary bread and butter, which he specified in a whisper, exactly at six o'clock.

“And I have a spare room that you are most kindly welcome to, if ye can put up with my small accommodations, Mr. Charteris,” said the master of the little house, as they passed into the street; “but I see you are for asking where we are to go. There is one person in the town that may very likely help us, I think. She was aunt to my sister-in-law, that's now departed, and knew all about the Allenders. She is an old woman. I would not say, but she has the better of me by twenty years; but she's sharper at worldly business yet, than many folk in their prime. She has some bits of property and money saved that will come to the bairns no doubt some time, but the now she holds a firm grip, and is jealous of respect on the head of it. I will take it kind if ye will just grant her the bit little ceremony that has grown a necessity to her, Mr.

Charteris. She is an aged woman, and it does not set youth ill to honour even the whims of gray hairs."

"I shall be very careful," said Cuthbert with a smile, for he did not think it needful to add that he was a very unlikely person to show any want of courtesy to the aged or the weak.

They walked through the town somewhat slowly, for the old man paused now and then to point out with genuine pride and affection the notable things they passed. The polemic Brigs, the Wallace tower. His mild gray eye kindled as he reminded his visitor that this was doubly classic ground. The land of Wallace, and of Burns—of the old traditional hero whose mighty form looms over his country still, and of the unhappy poet whom the poor of Scotland cherish in their hearts.

Alexander Muir was one of those whose end of life seems almost as pure as its beginning. A spirit so blameless and placid, that we might almost think it had only been sent here, because it is a greater joy to be a man, and know by certain experiment the wonderful mystery of redemption, than to be satisfied with such knowledge as the sinless in heaven can gain. It is happy for us, amid the dark records of common lives, that here and there God permits us one such man, born to be purer than his fellows, so much lower than the angels that the taint of native sin has come with him into the world—so much higher than they, that the mantle of the Lord has fallen upon him, and that he stands accepted in a holiness achieved by the Master and King of all. Lichened over with the moss of age, in quiet places here and there live gracious souls of this happy class, and Alexander Muir was one.

But very human was the pure unworldly spirit, deeply learned in the antiquities of the country, with which his very life seemed woven. Happily proud of all its fame and all its great men, and interested even in its prejudices, there could have been found nowhere a guide more pleasant. Cuthbert and he insensibly began to use the language of intimates—to feel themselves old friends; and when the children in the streets came forward to pull the old man's skirts, and solicit his notice, the young one, impatient at first of the delay, became soon so much interested in the universal acquaintance-ship of his cheerful companion, as to linger well pleased when he chose to linger. Almost every one who met them had a recognition respectful and kindly for uncle Sandy. His passage through the street was a progress.

"But we are putting off our time," said uncle Sandy at last. "This way, Mr. Charteris."

They were then in the outskirts of the town, before a two-story house, of smaller proportions than his own; the old man at last concluded his walk. The door stood open, and the sanded passage leading to a flight of stone stairs, floured and white with "camstane," proclaimed the house to have more occupants than one. A door opening into this passage gave them a glimpse of a family apartment, where the mother stood at an ample tub washing, while children of all sizes overflowed the limits of the moderately clean kitchen. This woman, Mr. Muir addressed kindly, inquiring after her exuberant family first, and then for Miss Jean.

"Ou ay, there's naething ails her," was the answer, given not without some seeming ill-humour. "I was paying her the rent yestreen. She's glegger about siller now than ever I was a' my days; and as for gieing a bawbee to a wean, or an hour's mercy to a puir body, ye micht as weel move the heart o' a whinstane; no that we're needing ony o' her charity. I have a guid man to work for me, that has been even on seven year wi ae maister, and there's no mony could say that; but it's awfu' to see an auld body wi' such a grip o' the world."

Leaving Miss Jean's tenant, operating with angry energy upon the garments in her hands, they proceeded up the camstaned stair to the door of Miss Jean's own habitation. A very small girl, dressed in a remote and far-away fashion, with a thick cap covering her short-cut hair, admitted them, recognising the old man with a smile of evident pleasure, and looking with a little alarm at his companion.

"You will tell Miss Jean it's me, Katie, and a stranger gentleman I've brought to see her," said uncle Sandy; "and when is she to let you home to see your mother?"

"Whisht," said the little girl in a whisper; "she'll hear. She'll no let me at a'. Oh, if you would speak to her, uncle!"

"So I will, Katie, my woman," said the old man kindly, patting the head of the little drudge as she showed them into a front room; "and mind you and be a good bairn in the mean time, and dinna be ill to her, even if she is ill to you: and now you must tell Miss Jean."

The child lingered a moment. "If ye please, uncle—maybe she'll no let me speak to you after—is Lettie ever coming back again?"

"Maybe, my dear; there's no saying," said uncle Sandy. "I will try if she can come to see you, or maybe I will take

you to see her; but, Katie, my woman, you must tell Miss Jean."

The little girl went away with a lighter step. "She is a faraway cousin," said the old man, "a fatherless bairn, poor thing, needing whiles to eat bitter bread; if our bairns come to their kingdom they must take Katie Calder. I think the blood is warmer on our side of the house; any way none of them will grudge the bit lassie her upbringing."

Miss Jean Calder's best room was furnished with a set of old lugubrious mahogany chairs, and a solemn four-posted bedstead, with terrible curtains of heavy dark moreen. Neither the bed nor the room were ever used, the other apartment serving all purposes of kitchen, parlour, and sleeping-room to its aged mistress and her little handmaiden. They could hear sounds of some little commotion in it as they sat down to wait. Miss Jean had preparations to make before she could receive visitors.

At last, having completed these, she entered the room. She was a tall and very meagre old woman, with very false black hair smoothed over the ashy wrinkled brow of extreme age, and a dirty cap of white net, hastily substituted for the flannel one in which she had been sitting by the fireside in the other room; an old, dingy, much-worn shawl and a rustling black silk apron covered the short-comings of her dress; but underneath the puckers of her eye-lids, keen, sharp, frosty eyes of blue looked out with undiminished vision; and, but for the pinched and grasping expression which seemed to have settled down upon them, there would have been intelligence still in the withered features, which once, too, had had their share of beauty. Some one says prettily that Nature, in learning to make the lily, turned out the convolvulus. One may trace something like this in the character of a family as it descends from one generation to another, as if, the idea of a peculiar creation once taken up, experiments were made upon the race, and gradations of the mind to be produced, were thrown, first into one position and then another, until the climax was put upon them all by the one commanding spirit in which the design was perfected. It is not uncommon. Miss Jean Calder was a lesser and narrower example of the mind of Martha Muir; eager in her young days to raise herself above her comrades, she had repelled with disdain the neighbours' sons, who admired her; while yet she resented bitterly the neglect with which her honest wooers avenged themselves afterwards

for her disdain. Then the selfish, fiery, proud woman began with firm industry to make a permanent provision for herself; and from that early period until about two years before this time she had toiled early and late, like the poorest of labouring men. All that might have been generous and lofty—if there ever was such admixture in the ambition and pride of her youth—had evaporated long ago; a tyrant of unbending will in her small dominion—a hard, grasping, pitiless creditor to the miserable tenants who happened to be in her power—an unhappy spirit, clinging to the saddest dross of worldliness, she had become.

A sad object—but yet standing, to the mind of Martha Muir—if we may venture so to speak of the working of Him who creates all—in the relation of a study to a great painting—a model to a finished statue.

“Good morning to ye, Alexander Muir,” said Miss Jean, “who’s this ye’ve brought in your hand?”

“The gentleman is from Edinburgh, Miss Jean,” said Alexander. “He is a friend of Harry’s, and has been kind to him, as most folk are, indeed, who ken the lad.”

“I tell ye, Sandy, ye have made a fuil of that boy,” said the old woman harshly; “a wasterful spendthrift lad that would throw away every bawbee that he had, and mair, that he hasna; but he needna look to soin on me if ever he comes to want. I have nae mair than I can do wi mysel; and where’s my twenty shillings, guid white monie, that I gied to fit him out?”

“He will pay it back some day, no fear,” said Alexander, “for I hear from this gentleman that Harry is like to prosper, poor man, and no doubt he will mind his friends, Miss Jean. The gentleman has been speaking to me of your guid sister, John Calder’s wife. He thinks he kens some good friends she had. Did you ever hear what part that family came from?”

“Ay, good friends? where are they? what’s like to come o’t?” said Miss Jean, fixing the frosty eyes, whose keen light contrasted so strangely with her ashy wrinkled face, on Cuthbert.

“I cannot tell,” said Cuthbert, warily, “it depends entirely upon what relationship I may discover—but it may be good for those who were kind to the Allenders, Miss Calder, if I find that they were relatives of the family I suppose.”

“Kind to the Allenders? Do you ken, lad, that it was

my mother took them in, when their father died, and the poor things hadna a mortal to look after them?—kind to the Allenders, said he?—weel, weel—puir bairns, they're baith gane."

Something human crossed the sharp, pinched, selfish face—even in this degraded spirit there was a memory of the fragrant far away youth.

"And Mr. Charteris," said Alexander Muir, "would like to ken where they came from, Miss Jean—it is weel kent how good ye were to the orphans, I am meaning your mother—and no doubt you ken better about them than indifferent folk;—that was the way I troubled you, and brought Mr. Charteris this length."

"Wha's Mr. Charteris?"

"It's the gentleman," said the old man simply.

"If they left any papers," interposed Cuthbert, "or books, or any relics indeed from which we might discover their origin—I should feel it a great obligation, Miss Calder, if you would assist me to trace it."

"Obligation! I have little broo of obligation," said the old woman with a grating laugh, mingled of harshness and imbecility. "I have seen ower mony folk that I obliged, slip away out of my hand like a knotless thread; but is there anything like to come of it? I dinna ken this stranger lad—I can put trust in you, Alexander Muir—that is in what you *say* ye ken."

"Well, Miss Jean, it depends upon what the gentleman finds out," said the old man, a little proud of his tactics, and marvelling within himself at his own address, "if he can be satisfied by means of any papers or books or such like—I believe something good may come of it."

The old woman wavered. "It's a hantle trouble," she said, "to put a frail woman like me to, that have but a little monkey of a lassie to help me in the house,—but there is a kist ben yonder in below the bed—and there may be some bits of things in it—I dinna ken—but neither her nor me are fit to pu' it out."

"Can I help?" said Cuthbert, hurriedly.

"Ye're unco ready wi' your offer, lad," said Miss Jean, grimly, "it's no for love o' the wark, I judge, wi' thae bit white lassie's fingers—look at mine," and she extended a long shrivelled hand, armed like the claws of a bird, "na, na, I ken naething about you—but if Katie and you can manage it,

Sandy Muir—and she's a fashionless beat, no worth the half of the meat she eats—I'll be nae hindrance—ye can try."

CHAPTER XIII.

"Oh, lean and covetous old age!—a winter unblessed,
That blights where'er it touches."

ALEXANDER MUIR instantly proceeded in great haste to the kitchen whither Miss Jean suspiciously followed him. In a few minutes Cuthbert heard "the kist" making audible progress—and a very short time after, the old man called him out to the passage, between the two rooms, whither they had dragged it.

"Ye're giving yoursel a hantle fash wi' a thing that can never do you ony good, Sandy," said Miss Jean tauntingly, "for the Allenders were nae connexion to you, even though Violet Calder did marry your brother Jamie—Weel I wat she would have been better wanting him. It's a bonnie story when it's telled—a woman to live as lang as fifty year,—and syne to dee because her man died—auld taupie! when she might have been to the fore to have a share of the benefit if there is to be ony benefit—what ailed the fuil to dee?"

"Poor woman, she would have been blithe to remain, for the bairns' sakes," said the old man gently, "if it had not been otherwise ordained."

"Weel, there's the fewer to pairt it among, if onything comes o' this," said the miser. "Ye maun just stand back awee, my man. I dinna open a' my posies afore friend folk; and ye're no to think the Allenders left as muckle behind them, claithes and a' thegither, as would fill the half o' that kist. What there is, I'll bring ye, but I'll hae nae stranger middling wi' my gear."

Cuthbert withdrew as he was ordered, to the door of the "best room." The chest was a large one, painted a dull brown colour, and judging from its broken lock, containing nothing of any value. The old woman raised the lid, and dived into a wilderness of lumber, faded worn out cobweb-like garments, long ago unfit for use, but preserved nevertheless on the penurious principle of throwing nothing away. After long fishing

among these relics of ancient finery, Miss Jean at last produced from the very bottom of the abyss, a small quarto Bible in a dark decayed binding, much worn at the corners. "Here!" she said, abruptly handing it to Cuthbert, "ye can look at that, and I'll see if there's ony mair—there should be some papers in the shottle."

Cuthbert hastily returned to the window to examine the book; on the fly leaf was written simply the name of John Allenders, a remote date, and a text. It gave no further clue to its owner's identity.

"Have ye gotten onything, Mr. Charteris?" asked anxiously the old man at his side. Cuthbert could only shake his head as he turned over the dark old pages and looked for farther information in vain.

The Bible contained, as all Bibles do in Scotland, the metrical version of psalms sanctioned by the Kirk, and between the end of the New Testament and the beginning of these, it is customary to have the family register of births and deaths. Cuthbert turned hastily to this place; at first he concluded there was no entry, but on further examination, he found that two leaves had been pasted together, and that on the outer side of one something was written. He looked at it, "Behold I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke," was the melancholy inscription; and the handwriting was stiff and painful and elaborate, most like the hand of bitter grief. There were mistakes too and slips of the mournful pen. Cuthbert felt it move him greatly—so strange it seemed to see the mark of the faltering hasty fingers, which so long ago were at rest for ever.

One of the leaves had been a good deal torn in a vain endeavour to open this sealed record. Cuthbert feeling himself growing excited and anxious, with the wished for evidence so very near him, made other attempts which were as unsuccessful. The dead man had shut up the chronicle of his happier days that he might not see it in his desolation, and the jealous grief seemed to linger about it as its guardian still.

Cuthbert held it up to the light and endeavoured to read through, but with as little success as before. Alexander Muir had been watching him anxiously. There was a glass of water on the table, which Katie had brought for him; the old man wet his handkerchief, and with trembling hands spread it upon the hidden page.

"I dinna ken what a' thae papers are," said Miss Jean, en-

tering with a bundle of yellow letters tied together with a strip of old linen as yellow as themselves, but their's nae secrets in them, ye may look over them as ye like. What are ye doin' to the book?"

"There's something written here," said the old man, endeavouring vainly to conceal his anxiety.

"Ane wad think there was a fortune coming to *you*, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, "ye're unco anxious to bring profit to other folk."

"I aye wished weel to my neighbours," said Alexander, meekly, and with a little self-reproach. He felt as if it were almost selfish to be so anxious about his nephew's fortune.

In the meantime Cuthbert untied the string, and as the too jealous gum showed yet no indication of yielding, began to look over the papers. The first that came to his hands, evidently added by Miss Jean to the original heap, and ostentatiously displayed on the top, was an account for the funeral expenses of John Allenders, in which Mrs. Calder appeared debtor to William Lochhead, undertaker; unfortunately Miss Jean had not observed the rigid honesty with which it was endorsed in a very cramped female hand, "Paid by me, out of the notes left by John Allenders for his burial, leaving a balance of three pounds and a penny halfpenny for the behoof of Rose and Violet. Signed Margaret Calder."

Other tantalizing bits of writing were below this; a child's note signed Violet, and addressed to the father in some temporary absence from home, telling how Rose had begun to "flower" a collar, and how the writer herself had bought seeds with her sixpence for Mrs. Calder's garden. Another bit of paper contained a list in a hand more formed of different articles of "flowering," received from some warehouse. Then there were school accounts, for the girls, of a still earlier date, and at last Cuthbert came to a letter bearing the postmark of London and Stirling. He opened it in haste. It was a letter of commonplace condolence, beginning, "My dear Sir," and suggesting the ordinary kind of consolation for the loss of "my dear departed sister," and was signed by "Daniel Scott." Lindsay had not mentioned the surname of the wife of John Allenders—this letter was evidently from her brother.

Cuthbert went on with great anxiety, and very considerable excitement, just glancing up to see that the softening process carried on by Alexander Muir had not yet produced much effect, and taking no part in the conversation. The next letter

in the bundle was in the same hand, and in its substance little more interesting; but its postscript brought a flush of satisfaction to Cuthbert's eager face.

"I hear that your father is but weakly," wrote the matter-of-fact Daniel, "and your brother Gilbert being dead two months ago, as you were informed, has sent for Walter—that's the captain—home. If you were asking my opinion, I would say you should certainly come back to be at hand whatever might happen; for when once trouble comes into a family, there is no saying where it may end; and, after your father, and Walter, and Robert, there is no doubt that you are the right heir."

This letter had been torn up as if in indignation of the cold-blooded counsel. Cuthbert laid it aside as a link in the chain which he had to form.

"I'll no have the book destroyed wi' weet. I tell ye, I winna, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, extending her lean brown hand. "Let it abee wi' your napkin. I wonder that the like o' you, that pretends to be better than your neighbours, could gie such usage to the Scripture. Think shame o' yourself, man; and be done wi' your slaistering."

The old man thrust her hand away with less than his usual mildness. "Have patience a moment—just have patience. See, Mr. Charteris, see!"

Cuthbert rose—the leaves came slowly separate—and there in this simple record was all he sought.

"John Allenders, writer, fourth son of Gilbert Allenders, of Allenders, married, on the first day of March, 1769, to Rose Scott, daughter of Thomas Scott, builder, Stirling."

Cuthbert laid down the book on the table, and extending his hand, took the somewhat reluctant one of the anxious old man and shook it heartily. "It's all right, said Cuthbert, swinging the arm of uncle Sandy in unusual exhilaration. "It's all right. I have nothing to do but congratulate you, and get up the proof. I thought we would find it, and here it is as clear as daylight. It's all exactly as it should be."

"What is right? what's the lad meaning?" said Miss Jean, thrusting herself in between them; "and what are ye shaking hands wi' that foolish body Sandy Muir for, when it's me that ony thing belonging to the Allenders should justly come to? We keepit them here in our ain house; we gied the auld man decent burial as ye would see, and it's out of my book ye have gotten a' ye ken. What does the man mean shaking hands wi' Sandy Muir?"

"It's no for me—it's for the bairns—it's for Harry," said Alexander.

"Hairy! and what has Hairy to do wi't, I would like to ken? He's but a far-away friend; forbye being a prodigal, that it wad be a shame to trust guid siller wi'—Hairy!—the man's daft! what has he to do with John Allenders?"

"A little," said Cuthbert, smiling. "He is the *heir* of John Allenders, Miss Calder."

"The heir!" the old woman's face grew red with anger. "I tell ye he had nae lawful heir, if it binna the ane surviving that did him kindness. It's you that disna ken. Hairy Muir is but niece's son to me."

"But he is grandson to Rose Allenders," said Cuthbert, "and the heir of her father."

Miss Jean stood still for a moment, digesting the strange purport of those words; at last she stretched forward her hand to clutch the Bible. "The book's mine—ye ken nocht but what ye have gotten out of my book—gie it back to me, ye deceivers. Am I gaun to gie my goods, think ye, to better Hairy Muir? Na, na,—ye have come to the wrang hand; give me back my book."

"There is some property in the case," said Cuthbert, keeping his hand upon the Bible: "It cannot come to you, Miss Jean; for, though I believe you were very kind to them, you are not related to John Allenders; but Harry Muir is. Now, whether would it be better that this property should go to a stranger, or to your nephew who is in your debt?"

Miss Jean had been eager to interrupt him, but his last words were a weighty utterance. She paused to consider. "Ye're a clever chield," she said at last, with a harsh laugh. "I wadna say but ye could put a case gey weel. My nephew that's in my debt—and so he is, that's true—what kind o' property is't? ye'll be a writer, I reckon?"

"Yes," said Cuthbert, with a smile, "I am a writer. It is some land—a small estate, Miss Jean; but only one, who is a descendant of John Allenders, can be the heir, and that is Harry Muir."

"Weel, I take ye to witness that what ye have said is true," said the old woman, eagerly; "that this lad is in my debt; and payment I'll hae afore he brinks the possession a week. Wasna it out of my book ye got a' ye ken? and wha has sae muckle claim to consideration as me? I take ye to witness, and you, ye auld sneek-drawer; it was this ye was thinking

about a' the time—Oh Sandy Muir! me, in my innocence, thinking ye were taking this pains to do me a guid turn: as ye're awn me a day in harst, a'boddy kens; and you thinking o' yoursel a' the time. I wonder ye can have the face to look at me!"

"I am seeking nothing for mysel, Miss Jean," said Alexander, with a little pride, "the little I have will soon go to the bairns, as this will do. And I am thankful to say I owe ye nothing, if it be not in the way of good will."

"Guid will," said she, "bonnie guid will to take a braw inheritance out fra under my very een," said the old woman, bitterly. I haud ye bound for the value of that book, Sandy Muir, mind. I'll haud ye bound, and you too, my braw lad; sae if ye tak it away the noo ye sall bring it back again, or it will be a' the waure for yoursels. Mind what I say; I'll hae my goods spoiled and my gear lifted for nae man in this world."

Cuthbert promised with all reverence to restore the Bible, which he had considerable fears he would not be permitted to take away; and after they had soothed, so far as was possible, her bitter humour, Miss Jean, with as much courtesy as she was capable of, suffered them, rich in these precious documents, to depart.

"I'll no can speak to Miss Jean to-day, Katie," whispered uncle Sandy, as the little girl stole after them down stairs; "but keep you a good heart, my bonnie woman, there's blythe days coming, and may be I'll take you to see your mother myself."

"Are you sure this will do, Mr. Charteris?" continued the old man, when they were again on their way to town.

Cuthbert was in great spirits. "I will astonish Davie Lindsay," he said, smiling. "Oh yes, it will do, it was just the thing I wanted. Now we must have the register of the different marriages and births; that part of it will be easily managed, I fancy."

"My brother James's Family Bible is in my house," said uncle Sandy, "and he was married by Mr. Clunie, of the old kirk. I will go to the session clerk to-night, if you like, or it will be time enough the morn. He is never far out of the way, being an old man like myself, half idle, half independent. And, speaking of that, ye must see my garden, Mr. Charteris, though this is hardly the best time."

"You seem to keep it in excellent order," said Cuthbert.

"It's no bad, you see, Mr. Charteris, the house is my own, and so is it," said the old man, with a little natural pride, desiring to intimate that the substance was not altogether on the Calder side of Harry's ancestry; and it is just a pleasure to me to dabble in it in my own way. Indeed I think sometimes that it's this work of mine, and the pleasure of seeing the new life aye coming up through the soil, that makes me like the bairns so well."

"It has not always so pleasant a result," said Charteris.

"Mostly, I think, mostly," said Alexander. "For example, now, how could ye think a man that had such thoughts in his heart to a mouse or a gowan, as Burns had, could harm or be unkindly to the bits of buds of his own race; though to be sure I am not minding what a strong part evil had in that grand earthen vessel. Woes me! that what might have been a great light in the land should be but a beacon on the black rocks; but I never mind that when I read the Cottar."

"The Cottar is your favourite I think," said Charteris.

"Aye, I confess I like them all, ill as some of them are," said the poet's countryman; but the Cottar is near perfect to my vision, all but one place, where he puts in an apostrophe that breaks the story—that about 'Sweet Jenny's unsuspecting youth,' you mind. I aye skip that. He kent ill ower weel, poor man."

CHAPTER XIV.

"Here hath been dawning
Another blue day."

CARLYLE.

THE next morning, Cuthbert busied himself in obtaining extracts from registers. The proof he procured was very full and clear, establishing the legal as well as the moral certainty.

That day the family at Port Dundas were pursuing their ordinary employments with a greater hush and stillness about them than usual. Martha and Rose sat together sewing in the parlour. They were both very silent—in the exhaustion of hopelessness, afraid to speak to each other of the one great subject which absorbed their thoughts. Agnes had gone,

with her baby in her arms, to the kitchen to speak to Mrs. Rodger, and was lingering there a little, willing to be delivered from herself; while Violet had carried out a little wondering pre-occupied heart into the midst of a juvenile assembly in front of the house, and was gradually awaking out of abstraction into vigorous play.

The prospect was very cheerful from the window. Yonder little Maggie McGillivray, with unfailing industry, clipped and sang at her mother's door under the full sunshine of noon; and here upon the pavement the little form of Violet, poised on one foot, pursued the marble "pitcher" through the chalked "beds" necessary for the game, while her playmates stood round watching lest she should infringe its rules, and Mrs. McGarvie's tawny truculent tiger winked in the sunshine as he sat complacently looking on. The very din of traffic in the busy street was cheering and life-like; but the two sisters sat, with their little muslin curtain drawn, sick at heart.

At the window in the kitchen Miss Aggie Rodger stretched her considerable length upon the deal table, while the hapless idle Johnnie occupied his usual chair by the fireside, and Miss Jeanie in a dress a little, and only a little, better arranged than her sister, sat on the wooden stool near her; very prim and very busy. Miss Aggie had laid down her work, and from the table was making desperate lunges at the crowing baby.

In a dingy printed gown, girded round her waist by an apron professedly white, but as dingy as the print, and with a broad black ribbon tying down her widow's cap, Mrs. Rodger stood conversing with the lodger. "This is Thursday," said Agnes, "by the end of next week, Mrs. Rodger, I shall be ready with the rent."

"Very weel, Mrs. Muir," responded the widow, "what suits you will suit me. It's a new thing to me, I assure you, to be needing to seek siller. When Archie was to the fore, and a guid man he was to me, and a guid father to the weans, I never ance thought of such a needcessity as this; but ane maun submit to what's imposed; and then there's the wearifu' taxes, and gas, and water. I declare it's enough to pit folk daft—nae suner ae body's turned frae the door than anither chaps—its's just an even down imposition."

"Look at the pet—Luick, see! eh! ye wee rogue, will ye break my side comb," cried Miss Aggie, shaking the baby

with furious affection, from which the young mother shrunk a little.

"Dinna be sae wild, Aggie," said her prim sister. "Ye'll frighten the wean."

"Never you fash your head, Jean. Are ye there, ye wee pet? Eh, if he has na pittin his finger through yin o' the holes!"

Miss Aggie hurriedly snatched up her work, and the little wife drew away the baby in alarm. "Has he done much harm?" asked Agnes, "give it me, and I will put it in again."

"It's nane the waur," said the good-humoured hoyden, cutting out the injured "hole" with scissors. "I'll put it in with a stitch of point—it's nae size. Jean's at a new stitch, Mrs. Muir—did ye ever see it?"

"It's rather a pretty thing," said Miss Jeanie, exhibiting it with prim complacence. "I learned it from Beenie Ure, at the warehouse, and it's no ill to do. I was thinking of coming ben, to show Miss Rose; but it's no every body that Beenie would have learned it to."

"Wha's that at the outer door?" asked the idle brother, whose listless unoccupied life had made him quick to note all passing sounds.

"Losh me!" said Miss Aggie, looking up, "its Mr. Muir, and he's in an awfu' hurry."

Agnes ran to open the door. It was indeed Harry, and the face of pale excitement which he turned upon her, struck the poor wife to the heart. Little Violet ran up the stair after him, with eager curiosity. There was a sullenness, quite unusual to it, on the colourless face of poor Harry. He passed his wife without saying a word.

"Are you ill? what brings you home at this time? what is the matter, Harry?" cried the terrified Agnes.

He only pressed before her into the sitting-room.

As Harry entered, with Agnes and little Violet close behind him, the two melancholy workers in the parlour started in painful surprise. "Harry is ill!" exclaimed Rose, with the constant instinct of apology, as she threw down her work on the table.

"What now, Harry? what new misfortune has come upon us now?" asked the sterner voice of Martha.

"Harry, what is it? what ails you?" said poor Agnes, clinging to his arm.

He took off his hat, and began to press it between his

hands. "Agnes, Martha," said the young man with a husky dry voice, "it's not my fault—not this time—I've lost my situation."

The little wife uttered a low cry, and looked at him and the baby. Lost his situation! the sole means of getting them bread.

"What do you mean, Harry?" asked Martha.

The young man's sullen, despairing eye glanced round them all. Then he flung his hat on the table, and threw himself into the arm-chair. "I mean that, that's all. I've lost my situation."

For a moment they stood still, looking in each other's blank faces, as people do at the first stroke of a calamity; then Agnes put the baby into the arms of Rose, and herself glided round to the back of her husband's chair. She could not bear to see him cast himself down so, and hide his face in his hands. Her own eyes were half blinded with tears, and her gentle heart failing; but however she might suffer herself, she could not see Harry so cast down.

Violet stole again to the stool at his feet, and sat looking up in his face with the breathless interest of her years. Poor Agnes tried to draw away the hands from his face. He resisted her fretfully. Rose went softly about the room with the child, hushing its baby glee, and turning tearful eyes on Harry; but Martha stood, fixed as she had risen on his entrance, her hands firmly grasping the back of her chair, and her head bowed down.

The tears of poor Agnes were falling upon his clasped fingers. Hastily the unfortunate young man uncovered his face. "I suppose I shall have to sit by the fire like John Rodger, and let you be a slave for me," he exclaimed bitterly, clasping his wife's hands. Agnes could do nothing but weep and murmur "Harry! Harry!"

"I will work on the streets first—I will do anything," said Harry, in hysteric excitement. "I am not broken down yet, Agnes, for all they say. I can work for you yet. I will *be* anything, I will *do* anything, rather than let want come to *you*."

And the little wife wept over the hands that convulsively clasped her own, and could only sob again, "Oh, Harry, Harry!"

"Harry," said Martha, "what have you done? Let us understand it clearly. Answer first one thing. Lift up your

head, and answer me, Harry. Is the fault yours? Is it a misfortune or a sin?"

He did not meet her earnest, anxious eye; but he answered slowly, "The fault is not mine, Martha. I was, indeed, exasperated; but it was not me. I am free of this, Martha; it was no blame of mine."

She looked at him with jealous scrutiny; she fancied there was a faltering in his voice, and that he dared not lift his eyes to meet her own, and the misery of doubt convulsed Martha's heart. Could she believe him?

"If it is so," she said, with a calmness which seemed hard and cold to Rose, "I see no reason you have to be so much cast down. Agnes, do not cry. This working on the street is quite an unnecessary addition to the shock Harry has given us."

"If it is so!" cried Harry, with quick anger. "Martha, do you not believe me? will you not trust my word?"

"Be composed," said Martha, herself sitting down with a hopeless composure quite unusual to her; "tell us what the cause is calmly, Harry. It is a great misfortune; but every misfortune is to be borne. Let us look at it without exaggeration; tell me the cause."

He had worn her patience out, and the aspect her exhaustion took was that of extreme patience. It surprised and hushed them all. Rose laid the baby in his cradle, and stealthily took up her work. Agnes withdrew her hand from Harry's grasp; even he himself wiped his damp brow, and sat erect in his chair.

"I went to-day to the Bank to get a cheque cashed," he said, in his usual manner; "it was only a small cheque, only fifty pounds, and I put the notes in my coat pocket. Everybody does it. I did in that respect just as I have always done; but I was robbed to-day—robbed of the whole sum."

"What then?" said Martha, breathlessly.

"Of course I went at once and told Dick Buchanan. His father is not at home, and Dick took it upon him to reprove me for carelessness, and various other things," said Harry, with assumed bravado. "So we got to high words—I confess it, Martha. I was not inclined to submit to that from him, which I could scarcely bear from you. And the result was what I have told you—I gave up my situation, or rather he dismissed me."

There was a dead silence, for Martha's composure hushed

the condolences which otherwise would have comforted poor Harry, and made him feel himself a martyr after all.

"What did young Buchanan blame you for? not," said Martha, a rapid flush covering her face as she looked at her brother, "not with any suspicion—not for *this*."

He returned her look with one of honest and unfeigned indignation. "Martha!"

"I did not know," said Martha, hurriedly. "The lad is a coarse lad. I did not know what you meant. What did he blame you for, Harry?"

A guilty flush stole over Harry's face. He sighed deeply. "For many things, Martha," he said with simplicity, "for which you have blamed me often."

The stern questioner was melted. It was some time before she could resume her inquiries. "And how did it happen? How did you lose the money, Harry?" said Rose.

"It was no such wonder," answered Harry with a little impatience. "It is a thing that happens every day—at least many men have been robbed before me. They lie in wait about the banks, these fellows."

"And what way did you put it into your pocket, Harry?" said Violet. "I would have held it in my hand."

"Be quiet, Violet; what do you know about it?" exclaimed Harry angrily.

"And was it near the Bank you were robbed?" inquired Agnes.

Harry faltered a little. "Not very far from it."

"And did nobody see the thief? Surely if it was done in the open street, somebody must have seen who did it," said Rose.

"Harry's eyes were cast down. "No," he muttered in a very low tone, "they know their business too well to let anybody see them."

"Was it done in the street?" asked Martha quickly.

He faltered still more. "I don't know—not exactly in the street, I think. I met the captain of one of our—of one of Buchanan's ships; and I—I went with him to a place he was going to call at. I suppose it might be done about there."

Poor Harry! his head was bowed down—his fingers were fumbling with the table-cover. He could not meet the eyes which were fixed so anxiously upon him.

A low groan came from Martha's lips—it was hard to re-

linquish the comfort of believing that his besetting sin had no share in this misfortune—hard to have the courage quenched out of a heart, which could be buoyant, joyous—in the face of trials and dangers appointed by heaven, to be suffered and overcome—but who could do nothing against a weakness so inveterate and strong as this.

There was nothing more said for a time—they all felt this add a pang to their misfortunes; but while Martha's eyes were still fixed on the ground, and Rose and Agnes forbore to look at him, in delicate care for his humiliation, Harry had already lifted his head, and growing familiar with his position, forgot that there was in it any humiliation at all.

"I forgot to tell you," he said, "what will be very hard upon us—very hard indeed—these monied men have hearts like the nether millstone. Agnes, I don't know what you will do with your accounts. I have lost my quarter's salary as well as my situation."

The poor little wife looked at him aghast. She had been scheming already how she could get these accounts paid, and begin to "the opening" herself, to keep them afloat until Harry should hear of some other situation;—but this crowning calamity struck her dumb.

"They will hold me responsible for the whole fifty pounds," said Harry, in a low voice. "I don't think Mr. Buchanan himself would have kept back this that is owing me—this that I have worked for. I should not care so much for the whole debt," said poor Harry with glistening eyes, "because it would be a spur to me to labour more strenuously, and I don't doubt we might pay it off in a year or two—but to throw me on the world, and keep back this poor fifteen pounds—it is very cruel—to leave us without anything to depend on, until I can get another situation—it is very hard—but they do not know what it is to want five pounds, those prosperous men. Mr. Buchanan himself would never have done it—and to think that Dick should turn upon me!"

"It is well," said Martha, harshly, "I am pleased that he has kept this money—how we are to do I cannot tell—but I would not have had you take it, Harry. What you have lost was theirs, and we must make it up. Some way or other we will struggle through, and it is far better that you did not become further indebted to them by receiving this."

Harsh as her tone was, it was not blame—poor Harry's sanguine spirit rose. He could take some comfort from the

little pride that would rather descend to the very depths of poverty than have such a debt as this. The galling burden seemed for the moment to withdraw Martha's thoughts from the more-enduring misery, the weakness that plunged him into so many misfortunes.

But Agnes sadly considering how to satisfy the poor widow, Mrs. Rodger, who could not do without her money, and how to apologise to butcher, baker, and grocer,—could take no comfort;—darkly the cloud of grave care settled down upon the soft young features. “But what will I do with Mrs. Rodger,” said Agnes, “and Waters, and Mr. Fleming—oh Martha!”

“I will speak to them myself,” said Martha, compressing her lips painfully. “You shall not be subjected to this, Agnes—I will speak to them myself.”

“And Mrs. McGarvie,” said Agnes, “I might have done the things myself if I had only known—and Mrs. Rodger.”

“Mrs. Rodger must be paid,” said Martha. “I am going to the warehouse to-day—we must see—we must think about it all, Agnes.”

But they made no reference to Harry. Rose, who had said nothing all this time, was already working very rapidly, pausing for an instant sometimes to look round upon them with affectionate wistfulness, but scarcely slackening the speed of her needle even then; there was such occasion for labour now, as there had never been before.

Poor Harry! He sat in silence, and heard them discuss those sad economics—he saw that they made no reference to him; and the bitterness of having lost the confidence of those whose strong and deep affection could not be doubted, even by the most morbid pride, smote him to the heart. A momentary perception of his position disclosed itself to Harry, and with the instant spring of his elastic temperament, he felt that to perceive was to correct, and that the power lay with himself to recover all that he had lost. With a sudden start he turned to his wife and his sister.

“Agnes!—Martha!—why do you look so miserable? I will get another situation. We may be better yet than we ever were before.”

“And so we may,” said Martha, pressing her hand to her forehead, “and so we may—we will always hope and look for the best.”

Her voice sounded like a knell. Agnes, who was not

quick to discover shades of implied meaning, brightened at the words—but Rose, who deprecated and softened in other cases, could oppose nothing to this. It made herself sick and hopeless—for, worse than all impatience or harshness, was this conscious yielding to fruitless and false hope, as one yields to a fretful child.

CHAPTER XV.

“Now shall you see me do my daily penance.
Mean, say you?—’tis the grander suffering then.
And thus I bear my yoke.”—

IT had been Martha’s custom at all times to take upon herself the disagreeable things of daily life. A turbulent stormy spirit, it was impossible to form any apprehension of her character without taking into account the harsh and strong pride which had come undiminished through all her trials,

“—— the spurns
Which patient merit of the unworthy takes,”—

which are only felt by the refined poor. These petty indignities were bitter to Martha, yet she had a certain satisfaction in compelling herself to endure them. To stand among the indiscriminate host who maintained themselves as she did; to submit her work to the inspection of some small official; to listen patiently to comments upon it, made for the sake of preserving a needful importance and superiority; these and many a trifling insult more were very hard to bear, but there was a bitter pleasure in bowing to them, a stormy joy in the conscious force with which she subdued her own rebellious nature, and put her foot upon its neck. It was conquering her pride, she thought, and she conquered it proudly, using its own might to vanquish itself.

But though Martha could bear needful humiliations herself, this pride of hers, which enabled her to bear them, built a mighty wall round her children. She could not bear humiliation to brother or sister; they were hers—heart of her heart, crown of her honour, and with the constant watchfulness of jealous love she guarded them from derogation. With

courage unfailing she could bear what was needful to be borne if it might be in her own person, but if it fell on them, the blow struck to her heart.

And so she passed through crowds of prosperous people, who never bestowed a second look upon her—a woman growing old, with grey streaks in her hair, and harsh lines in her face. A *poor* woman, distressed and full of care, what was there to look at? But if some magic had changed the bodily form, which was a veil to her, into the person of some noble despot king, foiled and despairing, there was enough to rivet the eyes of a world.

She was carrying back a fortnight's laborious work, and filling up all the interstices of the greater misery, which did not change, were a hundred shifting plans of how to distribute this pittance. A strange chaos was in Martha's mind as she went through those crowded streets. Broken prayers, so often repeated that they came vacantly into her mind often, and often fell upon her like strong inspirations, forcing her almost to cry aloud in an agony of entreaty, mingled with those painful calculations of the petty sum she was about to receive, which hovered like so many irritating insects over the dull and heavy pain in her heart. The cloud would not disperse; the weight would not lighten from her. Harry, at home, had smiles of new confidence on his face already, and had talked Agnes and Rose into hope; but the days of hope were past for Martha. She desired to submit; she longed to bend her neck meekly under the yoke, and acquiesce in what God sent; but the struggle was hard, and it seemed to herself that she could have submitted easily to any affliction but this—this was the intolerable pain—and this was her fate.

The warehouse was in the Candleriggs, and a spruce clerk received the work from her, and paid her the joint wages of Rose and herself for the fortnight's labour. It was thirty shillings—a very little sum, though they thought it good. On rare occasions the weekly produce of their united toil was as much as a pound, but this was a more usual amount.

Filling her little basket with the renewed and increased supply of work given at her request, Martha turned to one of the dim streets of counting-houses which surround the Exchange. In the same line of buildings the Buchanans had their office, but Martha was not going there. She ascended another dusty stair at some little distance, and entering a smaller office, asked for Mr. Sommerville.

Mr. Sommerville was a ruddy comfortable man, in an easy chair; once a poor Ayrshire lad, now, totally forgetful of that time, a cautious, shrewd, wealthy merchant, richer than many of the splendid commercial magnates who lightened the dim sky around him. But some claim of distant kindred or ancient acquaintance connected him with the family of the Muirs; though his look of doubt as Martha entered, and his laconic greeting, "Oh, Miss Muir," when he recognised her, showed that this claim was of the slenderest kind.

"I have come to speak to you about my brother," said Martha, standing before him with a flush upon her face: "I mean I have taken the liberty, Mr. Sommerville, for Harry has lost his situation."

"What! the place I got for him in Buchanan's?" exclaimed the merchant. "What has he done that for? some misconduct I suppose."

"No misconduct," said Martha, with sudden courage; "nor have you the slightest ground for supposing so. Harry had money stolen from him on his way between the bank and the office—a thing which no one could foresee, and which has happened to many a wiser man. This is the cause; but this is not misconduct."

Mr. Sommerville waved his hand impatiently. "Yes, yes, I understand; I see. Money stolen from him: *I* never had money stolen from me. But I never will recommend a man again; they invariably turn out ill. How much was it?"

"Fifty pounds," said Martha, "for all of which he is responsible, and if he were but in another situation, which we would not fail to pay."

"Oh yes, that's all very well," said the merchant, "but how is he to get the other situation? There must have been great carelessness, you know, or they never would have dismissed him. I heard he was wild; young Buchanan told me he was wild, but I did not expect it was to end so soon."

"And neither it shall," said Martha, controlling, with absolute physical pain, the fierce hot anger of her mother-like love. "Mr. Buchanan has already taken from Harry a proportion of this sum. I pledge myself that the rest shall be paid."

"You!" He looked at her. Certainly, her name would not have been of the smallest importance at a bill; but glimmerings of truth higher than bills, or money values, will flash sometimes even on stolid men. For a moment his eyes rested

strangely upon her ; and then he turned away his head, and said, "Humph!" in a kind of confidential under tone. The good man rubbed his bushy hair in perplexity. He did not know what to make of this.

"But unless Harry has employment we can do nothing," said Martha, "all that is in our power, without him, must be the mere necessities of living. You have helped us before, Mr. Sommerville."

"If that was to be a reason for exerting myself again, in every case of distress that comes to me," said the merchant with complacency, "I can tell you, I might give up all other business at once ; but recommending a man who turns out ill is a very unpleasant thing to creditable people. There is Buchanan now—of course he took my word for your brother—and I assure you I felt it quite a personal reflection when his son told me that Muir was wild."

"And his son dared!" exclaimed Martha, with uncontrollable indignation, "and this youth who does evil of voluntary intent and purpose is believed when he slanders Harry! Harry, whom this very lad—that he should have power, vulgar and coarse as he is, with a brother of mine!—has betrayed and beguiled into temptation. But I do wrong to speak of this. The present matter is no fault of Harry's, yet it is the sole reason why he loses his situation ; and I see no ground here for any one saying that my brother has disgraced them."

Strong emotion is always powerful. It might be that Mr. Sommerville had no objection to hear Richard Buchanan condemned. It might be that Martha's fierce defence awoke some latent generosity in the mind she addressed. However that might be, the merchant did not resent her outburst, but answered it indistinctly in a low voice, and ended with something about "partiality," and "quite natural."

"I am not partial," said Martha hastily. "No one has ever seen, no one can ever see, Harry's faults as I do. I am not indifferent enough to pass over any one defect he has ; but Harry is young. He has reached the time when men are but experimenting in independent life. Why should he lose his good name for a common misfortune like this?"

"You should have stayed in Ayr," said Mr. Sommerville, with a little weariness. "I don't want to injure his good name! I have no object in hurting your brother ; indeed, for the sake of the old town, and some other things, I would help him to a situation if I could. I'll just speak to my cash-keeper. He knows about vacant places better than I do."

And partly to get rid of a visitor whose unusual earnestness embarrassed him; partly out of a sudden apprehension that he might possibly be called upon by and by for pecuniary help, if no situation could be got for Harry, Mr. Sommerville left his easy chair, and had a consultation in the outer office with his confidential clerk. Very weary and faint, Martha remained standing in the private room. Many a time in her own heart, with the bitterness of disappointed hope and wounded love, she had condemned Harry, but with the fierceness of a lion-mother, her heart sprang up to defend him when another voice pronounced his sentence. She could not bear the slightest touch of censure, instinctively she dared and defied whosoever should accuse him, and no one had liberty to blame Harry except the solitary voice which came to her in the night watches wrung out of her own heart.

In a short time Mr. Sommerville returned.

"I hear of one place, Miss Muir," said the merchant; "but there is security needed, and that might be a drawback—seventy pounds a year—a good salary, but then they want security for five hundred pounds. If you could manage that, the place is a very good one—Rowan and Thomson—and it is a traveller they want—not so much confinement as in an office; it might suit your brother very well, if it were not for the security."

"It would not do," said Martha, quickly. "Harry cannot be a traveller, it would kill him."

Mr. Sommerville elevated his eyebrows. "Cannot be a traveller! Upon my word, Miss Muir, to say that you came asking my help; you are very fastidious. I fancied your brother would be glad of any situation."

"Not this—only not this," said Martha in haste, as if she almost feared to listen to the proposal. "Harry is not strong. I thank you, Mr. Sommerville, I thank you; but it would kill him."

"Then, I know of nothing else," said the merchant, coldly resuming his seat. "If I hear of anything, I will let you know."

Cold words of course, often said, never remembered. Martha turned away down the dusty stairs, blaming herself for thus wasting the time in which she might have been working; but she could work—could give daily bread to the little household still—and that was the greatest comfort of her life.

Far different from the mill-girls and engineers of Port

Dundas was the passing population in these dusty streets. Elderly merchantmen with ease and competence in every fold of their spotless broadcloth—young ones exuberant and unclouded, casting off the yoke of business as lightly, out of the office, as they bore it sensibly within, met Martha at every step. Here come some, fresh from the Exchange. You can see they are discussing speculations, calculating elaborate chances, perhaps “in the way of business,” hazarding a princely fortune, which may be doubled or dissolved before another year. And a group of young men meet them, louder and more demonstrative, circling round one who is clearly the object of interest to all. Why?—he is going out to India to-morrow to make his fortune—and save that it gives him a little importance, and makes him the lion of the day, envied by all his compeers, this youth who is flushed just now with a little excitement, in reality feels no more about his Indian voyage, than if it were but a summer expedition to the Gairloch, or Roseneath Bay; and is much more comfortably assured of making his fortune, than he would be of bringing home a creditable amount of trout, if the event of to-morrow was a day’s fishing, instead of the beginning of an eventful life. Of the youths around him, one will be the representative partner of his “house” in far America before the year is out; another will feed wool in the bush; another learn to adorn his active northern life, with oriental pomps and luxuries by the blue waves of the Bosphorus. And among them all there is a certain fresh confident unconscious life, which, so far as it goes, carries you with it in sympathy. It is not refined, it is not profound, it has little elevation and little depth; but withal it has such a fresh breeze about it, such a continual unceasing motion, such an undoubting confidence in its own success, that this simplicity of worldliness moves you as if it were something nobler. Not true enough, nor great enough to call the solemn “God speed” out of your heart; yet you cannot choose, but wish the young adventurers well.

And there are clerks more hurried; young men with quick business step and eye, whose sons shall be merchants’ sons, as carelessly prosperous as are the young masters in the office now; but some who will live and die poor clerks, yet who will have their share of enjoyed life as well, and end their days as pleasantly, pass and repass among the crowd. Some, too, who will sink and fall, who will break hearts, and give fair hopes the death-blow. So much young life; so many souls, each to

make its own existence for itself; and not another. There come solemn thoughts into the mind which looks on such a scene.

And Martha, half abstracted, looked on it, comparing them with Harry. But there was none like Harry—not one; the heart that clasped its arms about him in his misfortune—the dry eye which watched the night long with schemes for his prosperity—could see none worthy to be placed beside him. Poor Harry! his sister could not see these others, for his continual shadow resting on her heart.

When Martha had nearly reached the Exchange, she heard some one calling after her. It was John Buchanan; he came up out of breath.

“Will you tell Harry that I think he should come down and see my father, Miss Muir?” gasped John. “I’ve been chasing you for ten minutes—you walk so fast. My father’s come home, and he’s shut up with Dick. I don’t think he’s pleased. If Harry would come down to-morrow, it might be all right again.”



CHAPTER XVI.

“’Tis the weak who are overbold; your strong man can count upon the might he knoweth; your feeble one, in fancy sets no bound to his bravery, nor thinks it time to fail till there is need of standing.”

“SEVENTY pounds a-year,” repeated Harry Muir, as his sisters and his wife sat round him, all of them now busy with the “opening,” while Violet kept the baby; “and my uncle might be security, ‘say for three hundred pounds.’ It’s a mere matter of form, you know. Perhaps they would take him for three hundred instead of five; and Rowan and Thomson is a very good house. I think I might go down to-morrow and inquire.”

“It would not do—you must not think of it,” said Martha quickly.

“Why must I not think of it? I don’t believe John Buchanan is right, Martha, about his father quarrelling with Dick for sending me away. And, besides, how could I return there where they all knew I was dismissed—*dismissed*, Mar-

tha ; besides Dick's own abuse. I could not do it. I would rather do anything than go back ;—and seventy pounds a-year ! ”

“ Harry, let us rather labour for you night and day.”

His face grew red and angry. “ Why, Martha ? I am not a child surely that I cannot be trusted. What do you mean ? ”

“ No,” said Martha bitterly, “ you are not a child ; you are a full-grown man, with all the endowments a man needs to do something in the world. You can constrain the will of these poor girls, who think of you every hour they live ; and you can assert your independence, and be proud, and refuse to bear the reproof you have justly earned. God forgive me if I am too hard ; but you wear me out, Harry. When I say you must not seek for a fatal occupation like this, have I not cause ? Do I need to descend to particulars ? Would you have me enter into detail ? ”

“ Martha ! Martha ! ” The trembling hand of Rose was on her arm, anxiously restraining her ; and Agnes looked up into the sullen cloud on Harry's face, whispering, “ Do not be angry ; she does not mean it, Harry.”

“ Is it because I am in your power that you taunt me, Martha ? ” he said, fiercely.

Martha compressed her lips till they grew white ; she did not answer. After the first outburst, not even the cruel injustice of this received a reply. She had herself to subdue before she could again approach him.

And the two peacemakers, hovering between them, endeavoured, with anxious pains, to heal the breach again. The young wife whispered deprecatory words in Harry's ear, while she laid her hand on Martha : but pitiful looks were all the artillery of Rose ; they softened both the belligerents.

“ I don't care what happens to us out of the house, Martha,” said Rose at last ; “ but surely we may be at peace within. There are not so many of us in the world ; we should be always friends.”

And Martha's anger was shortlived. “ I spoke rashly,” she said, with strange humility ; “ let us say no more of this now.”

And there was little more said that night.

But Harry would not go to the office again to see Mr. Buchanan ; and, poor as they were, none of them desired to subject him to this humiliation. So he went out instead the

next morning to make bootless inquiries and write bootless letters—exertions in which there was no hope and little spirit; went out gloomily, and in gloom returned, seeking comfort which they had not to bestow.

But while poor Harry was idle perforce, a spasmodic industry had fallen upon the rest. They scarcely paused to take the simple meals of necessary life; and the pleasant hour of family talk at tea was abridged to-night to ten minutes, sadly grudged by the eager labourers, on whose toil alone depended now the maintenance of the family. Little Violet stood by the table with a clean towel in her hand, preparing, with some importance, to wash the cups and saucers when they had finished. But Harry lingered over the table, leaning his head on his hand, and trifling with something which lay by him. Violet, in housewifery impatience, moved about among the cups, and rung them against each other to rouse his attention, and let him see he retarded her; but Harry's mind was too much occupied to notice that.

"Harry," cried Agnes, rather tremulously from the inner room, "I see Mr. Gilchrist on the road. He is coming here. What can it be?"

Harry started and put away his cup. They all became anxious and nervous; and Agnes hastily drew her seat close to the door of the room, that she might hear what the visitor said, though her baby, half dressed, lay on her knee, very sleepy and impatient, and she could not make her appearance till she had laid him in his little crib for the night.

Thus announced, Mr. Gilchrist entered the room. He was a massy large man, with grizzled hair, which had been reddish in his younger days, and kindly grey eyes gleaming out from under shaggy eyebrows. His linen was spotless; but his dress, though quite appropriate and respectable, was not very trim; little layers of snuff encumbered the folds of his black waistcoat; and from a steel chain of many complicated links, attached to the large round silver watch in his fob, hung two massy gold seals, one of them engraven with an emphatic "J. G." of his own, the other an inheritance from his father. There was no mistaking the character and standing of this good and honourable man: his father before him had been head clerk in an extensive mercantile house in Glasgow; his sons after him might be that, or greater than that. With his two hundred pounds a-year, he was bringing up such a family as should hereafter do honour and service to their country and community; and

for himself, no better citizen did his endeavour for the prosperity of the town, or prayed with a warmer heart, "Let Glasgow flourish."

"Harry, my man," said Mr. Gilchrist, as he held Harry's hand in his own, and shook it slowly, "I am very sorry about this."

"Well, it cannot be helped," said Harry with a little assumed carelessness, "we must make the best we can of it now."

"Ay, no doubt," said the Cashier, as he turned to shake hands with Rose and Martha, "to sit down and brood over a misfortune, is not the way to mend it; but it may not be so bad as you think. Angry folk will cool down, Harry, if ye leave them to themselves a little."

Harry's heart began to beat high with anxiety—and Rose cast furtive glances at Mr. Gilchrist, as she went on nervously with her work, almost resenting Martha's calmness. But Agnes had entered just then from the inner room, and the kindly greeting which the visitor gave her, occupied another moment, during which the excitable Harry sat on thorns, and little Violet, holding the last cup which she had washed in her hands, polished it round and round with her towel, turning solemn wide open eyes all the time upon this messenger of fate.

"I have a letter from Mr. Buchanan," said Mr. Gilchrist, drawing slowly from his pocket a note written on the blue office paper. Harry took it with eager fingers. Agnes came to the back of his chair, and looked over his shoulder. Rose, trying to be very quiet, bent her head over her work with a visible tremor, and Martha suffered the piece of muslin she had been working at, to fall on her knee, and looked with grave anxiety at Harry.

Round and round went the glancing tea-cup in the snowy folds of the towel which covered Lettie's little hands, for she too forgot what she was doing in curious interest about this; a slight impatient exclamation concluded the interval of breathless silence. "No, I cannot take it—it is very kind, I dare say, of Mr. Buchanan; but I cannot accept this," exclaimed Harry as he handed the letter across the table to Martha.

But the visitor saw, that in spite of Harry's quick decision, he looked at his sister almost as if he wished her opinion to be different. Agnes too changed her position, and came to Martha's side. The letter was very short.

"SIR :—My son has informed me of the circumstances under which you have left the office. I regret the loss for your sake, as well as my own, but I cannot feel myself justified in doing what I hear my son threatened to do ; consequently, if you will call at the office in the course of to-morrow, Mr. Gilchrist has instructions to pay you the full amount of your quarter's salary, due on the 1st proximo.

"I am, Sir,
"Your obedient Servant,
"GEORGE BUCHANAN."

"I cannot take it—I do not see how I can take it," said Harry, irresolutely, as he sought Martha's eye.

"It's nonsense, that," said Mr. Gilchrist, taking out a large silver snuff-box and tapping slowly on its lid, with his great forefinger, "you must look at the thing coolly, Harry, my man. It's no fault of yours that you lost the money ; no sensible person would blame you for that—a thing which has happened to many a one before. I mind very well being once robbed myself. I was a lad then, about your years, and the sum was thirty pounds ; but by good fortune twenty of it was in an English note, and not being very sure whether it was canny or not, I had taken its number—so off I set to all the banks and stopped it. It was a July day, and I was new married, and had no superabundance of notes, let alone twenty-pounders—such a race I had," said Mr. Gilchrist with a smile, raising his red and brown handkerchief to his brow in sympathetic recollection, "I believe I was a stone lighter that night. I succeeded, and got back my English note very soon ; but Mr. Buchanan would not hear of deducting the other ten from my salary ; and he's better able to stand the loss of a few pounds now than he was then. Think better of it, Harry."

"I think Mr. Gilchrist is right," said Martha, "no one could possibly blame you for such a misfortune, Harry—and Mr. Buchanan is very good—you have no right to reject his kindness ; it is as ungenerous to turn away from a favour frankly offered, as it is to withhold more than is meet"

"It is very well said, Miss Muir," said Mr. Gilchrist, contemplating the long inscription upon the heavy chased lid of his snuff-box, with quiet satisfaction. "I really think it would be an unkindly thing to throw back this which was meant for a kindness into the hands that offer it. He is not an ill man, George Buchanan ; 'for one ye'll get better, there's waur ye'll

get ten,' as the song says; and besides, Harry, I was young once myself, and so was my wife. I mind when our James was in his cradle like that youngster there, we had just little enough to come and go on; and for any pride of your own, you must see and not scrimp your wife. Touts man, you are not going to take ill what I say. Do you think, if I lost a quarter's salary just now, it would not scrimp *my* wife? and I think no shame of it."

"Neither do I think shame—certainly not," said Harry, "we have only what we work for. But I have actually lost Mr. Buchanan's money—I don't see."

"Harry," interrupted Mr. Gilchrist, "never mind telling me what you don't see—come down to the office to-morrow, and hear what Mr. Buchanan says—he has older eyes than you, and knows the world better, and there's no saying what may come of it; for you see, Mrs. Muir," continued the Cashier, casting down his kindly eyes again upon the grandiloquent inscription which testified that his snuff-box had been presented to him by young men trained in the office under his auspices, as a token of esteem and respect, it is wonderful what a kindness everybody has for this lad. I myself have been missing his laugh this whole day, and scarcely knowing what ailed me—so may be something better may turn up if he comes down to-morrow."

"And Martha thinks you should go—and mind all that we have to do, Harry," whispered Agnes.

A glow of pleasure was on Harry's face—he liked to be praised, and felt in it an innocent kindly satisfaction—but still he hesitated. To go back again among those who knew that he had been dismissed and disgraced—to humiliate himself so far as again to recognise Dick Buchanan as his superior—to present himself humbly before Dick Buchanan's father, and propitiate his favour. It was very unpalatable to Harry, who after his own fashion had no lack of pride.

"I will see about it. I will think it over," said Harry, doubtfully.

"I think I must send our Tom to you in his red gown," said Mr. Gilchrist; "where he got it, I cannot say, but they tell me the lad is a metaphysical man—if he ever gets the length to be a preacher, we will have to send him East, I'm thinking, for metaphysics seldom flourish here away; but now my wife will be redding me up for being so late. Mind, Harry, I will expect to see you at the office to-morrow."

The good man rose to go away. "By-the-bye," he added as he shook hands with Rose—and Rose felt herself look guilty under his smiling glance, "I saw a friend of yours coming off the Ayr coach as I came up—the advocate lad, Mr. Buchanan's nephew. You are sure of his good word, Harry, or else I am much mistaken."

"Mr. Charteris!—he has come back very soon. Good night, Mr. Gilchrist, I will think about it," said Harry, as he went to the door with his sister.

Mr. Gilchrist left some excitement behind him. Agnes had risen into tremulous high spirits. Rose was touched with some tremor of anticipation, and Martha, watchful and jealous, looked at her sister now and then with scrutinising looks; for Mr. Gilchrist's last words had awakened Martha's fears for another of her children; while in the meantime little Violet had polished all the cups and saucers, and was now putting them with much care away.

"Harry will go—do you not think he must go, Martha?" said Agnes. "Mr. Gilchrist says they miss him in the office. I don't wonder at that. He will go back again, Martha?"

"I think he should—I think he will," said Martha, with a slight sigh. "There might have been something better in a change—one has always fantastic foolish hopes from a change—but I believe this is best."

Agnes was a little damped; for she saw nothing but the highest good fortune in this unlooked-for overture of Mr. Buchanan.

Harry lingered at the outer door in a very different mood. He, too, had been indulging in some indefinite hope from change. He could not see that the former evils lay in himself—poor Harry! He thought if the circumstances were altered, that happier results might follow—and while he was not unwilling to return to his former situation, and had even a certain pleasure in the thought that it was open to him, the submission which it would be necessary to make, galled him beyond measure. He stood there at the door, moody and uneasy; not weighing his own feelings against the well being of the family, certainly, for Harry was not given to any such process of deliberation—but conscious that the two were antagonistic, and moodily letting his own painful share in the matter bulk largest in his mind.

Just then a hackney coach drew up at a little distance from the door, and Cuthbert Charteris leaped out. He was a

good deal heated, as Harry thought, and looked as if he had taken little time to rest, or put his dress in order since he finished his journey—but he carried nothing except a little paper parcel. He came up at once to Harry and shook hands with him cordially—they went up stairs together.

“I have just come from Ayr,” said Cuthbert with some embarrassment, as he took his old place at the window—“you must pardon my traveller’s costume, Mrs. Muir, for it is not half an hour since I arrived.”

“You have had little time to see the town,” said Harry. “Did you find my uncle? Has he sent any message with you, Mr. Charteris?”

“I have a message,” said Cuthbert, clearing his throat, and becoming flushed, “but before I deliver it, Mr. Muir, you must hear a long preface.”

“Is my uncle ill?” exclaimed Martha. “Has any thing happened?”

“Nothing has happened. He is quite well,” said Cuthbert, “only I have been making some inquiries about your family concerns, for which I need to excuse myself by a long story.”

Harry was still standing. He drew himself up with great hauteur, and coldly said, “Indeed.”

Rose lifted her head for a moment with timid anxiety; the light was beginning to fail, but Rose still sat in her corner, holding the work which at present made little progress. Martha had laid down hers. Agnes had withdrawn to the sofa with her baby, who, already asleep, would very soon be disposed of in the cradle; while Harry, with unusual stateliness, leaned against the table, looking towards Cuthbert.

“I think I mentioned before I went away,” said Charteris, “that my errand to Ayr was connected with one of those stories of family pride and romance and misfortunes, which sometimes lighten our legal labours. This story you must let me tell you, before I can explain how my motives for searching out these, were neither curiosity nor impertinence.”

As Cuthbert spoke, he opened his parcel, placed the old Bible on the table, and handed to Harry a little roll of papers. They were formal extracts from the register of the old church at Ayr, attested by the session clerk, proving the marriage of Rose Allenders with John Calder, and of Violet Calder with James Muir, together with the register of Harry’s own birth.

Harry was quite bewildered; he turned over the papers,

half curious, half angry, and tried to look cool and haughty; but wonder and interest defeated his pride, and impatiently calling for the candle, which Violet, with much care, was just then bringing into the room, Harry threw himself into the arm-chair, and resting his elbows on the table, leaned his head upon both his hands, and fixed his eyes, with a half defiance in them, full upon Cuthbert.

The others drew near the light with interest and curiosity as great as his; but though they held their breath while they listened, they did not restrain their fingers—the necessity of work was too great to be conquered by a passing wonder.

“Not much short of a century since,” said Cuthbert, becoming excited in spite of himself, “a family in the neighbourhood of Stirling had their composure disturbed by what seemed to them the very foolish marriage of one of their sons. There were six sons in the family; this one was the fourth, and at that time had very little visible prospect of ever being heir. They were but small gentry, and I do not very well know why they were so jealous of their gentility; but however that might be, this marriage was followed by effects as tragic as if the offender had been a prince’s son instead of a country laird.

“His father disinherited and disowned him; he was cut off from all intercourse with his family; but in his own affairs he seems to have been prosperous enough until his wife died. That event closed the brighter side of life for this melancholy man. He had two daughters, then children, and with them he left Stirling.”

A slight start moved the somewhat stiff figure of Martha; Rose unconsciously let her work fall and turned her head towards Cuthbert; Harry remained in the same position, fixedly gazing at him; while Agnes, rocking the cradle gently with her foot, looked on a little amused, a little interested, and not a little curious, wondering what the story could mean.

“After this,” continued Cuthbert, “my hero, we suppose, went to London (another strange start as if of one half asleep, testified some recognition, on Martha’s part, of the story), but there I lose trace of him. It is only for a short time, however, for immediately afterwards I find him at Ayr.”

“At Ayr?” Harry too, started now, and again turned over the papers, which he still held in his hand, as if looking for a clue.

“In the meantime,” said Cuthbert, “all the other mem-

bers of the family are dead ; there is no one remaining of the blood but this man—the children of this man.”

“And his name?” said Martha, with a slight hoarseness in her voice.

“His name,” said Cuthbert, drawing a long breath of relief, as his story ended, “was John Allenders.”

There was a momentary silence. They looked at each other with bewildered faces. “What does it mean?” said Harry, becoming very red and hot as the papers fell from his shaking fingers ; “I cannot see—it is so great a surprise—tell us what it means.”

“It means,” said Cuthbert, quickly, “that you are the heir of John Allenders of Allenders, and of an estate which has been in the family for centuries, worth more than four hundred pounds a year.”

Harry looked round for a moment almost unmeaningly—he was stupefied ; but Agnes stole, as she always did in every emergency, to the back of his chair, and laid her hand softly on his shoulder. It seemed to awake him as from a dream. With one hand he grasped hers, with the other he snatched the work from Martha’s fingers and tossed it to the other end of the room. “Agnes ! Martha !”

Poor Harry ! A sob came between the two names, and his eyes were swimming in sudden tears. He did not know what to say in the joyful shock of this unlooked-for fortune ; he could only grasp their hands and repeat their names again.

Cuthbert rose to withdraw, feeling himself a restraint on their joy, but Martha disengaged herself from the grasp of Harry, and would not suffer him to move.

“No, no ; share with us the pleasure you bring. You have seen us in trouble, stay with us now.”

“Is it true, Mr. Charteris, is it true ?” said Agnes, while Harry, still perfectly tremulous and unsteady, threw Rose’s work after Martha’s, and shaded his eyes with his hands, lest they should see how near weeping he was—“Tell us if it is true.”

Harry started to his feet. “True ! do you think he would tell us anything that was not true ? Mr. Charteris, if they were not all better than me, I would think it was a delusion, that neither such an inheritance nor such a friend could come to my lot. But it’s for them—it’s for them ! and a new beginning, a new life. Martha, we shall not be worsted this time—it is God has sent us this other battle-field.”

And Harry, with irrestrainable emotion, lifted up his voice and wept. His little wife clung to his shoulder, his stern sister bent over him with such an unspeakable tenderness and yearning hope in her face, that it became glorified with sudden beauty, and Cuthbert remembered uncle Sandy's thanksgiving, and himself could have wept in sympathy for the solemn trembling of this joy ; for not the sudden wealth and ease, but the prospect of a new life it was which called forth those tears.

"And what did my uncle say, Mr. Charteris?" said Rose, when the tumult had in some degree subsided. No one but Rose remembered that Cuthbert had spoken of a message from uncle Sandy.

"He bade me repeat to you a homely proverb," said Cuthbert, who was quite as unsteady as the rest, and had been a good deal at a loss how to get rid of some strange drops which moistened his eyelashes. "It takes a strong hand to hold a full cup steady ; that is the philosophy I brought from your uncle."

"No fear," said Harry, looking up once more with the bright clear loveable face, which no one could frown upon. "No fear, what could I do with my arms bound? What could I do in yon office? but now, Martha, now!"

And Martha once more believed and hoped, ascending out of the depths of her dreary quietness into a very heaven. Few have ever felt, and few could understand this glorious revulsion. With an impatient bound she sprang out of the abyss, and scorned it with her buoyant foot. It might not last, perhaps it could not last, but one hour of such exulting certain hope, was almost worth a lifetime's trial.

"And I will get a little room all to myself, and Katie Calder will come and sleep with me," said Violet.

They all laughed unsteadily. It brought them down to an easier level.

"I think, Mr. Muir, you should come at once with me to Edinburgh," said Cuthbert, "and see your lawyer, who has been hunting for you for some time, and get the proof and your claim established. I begin to think it was very fortunate he broke his leg, Miss Muir, for otherwise I might never have seen you."

"And what made you think of us? how did you guess?" said Harry.

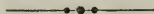
"Rose and Violet," said Cuthbert, with a little shyness. "It was a happy chance which gave these names."

Rose drew back a little. There was something unusual, it seemed, in Cuthbert's pronunciation of her pretty name, for it made her blush; and by a strange sympathy Mr. Charteris blushed too.

"When shall we start? for I suppose you will go with me to Edinburgh," continued Charteris.

Harry hesitated a moment. "I must go down to the office to-morrow," he said, with his joyous face unclouded. "Your cousin Dick and I had something which I thought a quarrel. It was nothing but a few angry words after all. I will go down to-morrow."

Harry had entirely forgotten how angry he was—entirely forgotten the insulting things Dick Buchanan said, and what a humiliation he had felt it would be, to enter that office again. Poor Harry was humble now. He had such a happy ease of forgetting, that he did not feel it necessary to forgive. Bright, sanguine, overflowing with generous emotions, Harry in his new wealth and happiness that night could not remember that there was any one in the world other than a friend.



CHAPTER XVII.

Methinks, Sir,
A mother's heart's transparent—'tis so easy
To find the way into 't.

"WELL, Cuthbert, my man, are you back from your gowk's errand? The month is far on now; it has taken you long," said Mrs. Charteris.

"I have first to present my friend to you, mother," said the advocate; "and as he will be Mr. Harry Muir only a day or two longer, we must make the most of him while he bears his old name."

"So you were right after all?" said the old lady, lifting up her hands. "Dear me, Cuthbert, to think of that! You see, Mr. Muir, I could not believe his story, and prophesied that he was sure to fail—though I am very glad I was wrong. You are welcome to Edinburgh, and I wish you joy of your inheritance."

With a natural diffidence, which flushed his cheek, and

slightly restrained his speech, Harry Muir made his acknowledgments. His dress had been most carefully overlooked before he left Glasgow that morning, and his eye was shining with animation and high hope.

Mrs. Charteris felt "her heart warm" to the stranger, as he took the great easy-chair in the corner, and bent forward towards Cuthbert as to his guide and counsellor. The attitude and expression charmed Cuthbert's mother. She felt that her son had done much for this young man—that he would do more—and Harry Muir became dear to her good heart, because he made her son dearer, and still more worthy of love.

"We must be off again instantly, mother," said Cuthbert, "to meet Davie Lindsay at my office. Ah, Davie is a slow man; he has not an eye for a mystery like some other people; but I suppose I must not boast. To-day we shall do a little business; to-morrow we propose a trip up the Firth by the Stirling steamer, and a glance at Allenders. Muir, it will take lots of money to put that house in decent order, you may be sure."

Harry laughed; twenty pounds would have been lots of money to Harry two days ago. It struck him as being slightly ludicrous, and certainly quite amusing, all this grandeur of expectation. That *he* should have a house to repair, and lots of money to repair it—he, Harry Muir!

"It is a fine country, is it not?" he asked, in some haste, to cover his nervous joy. "I have never seen those Links of Firth, and their very name raises one's expectation. Did you not say this house of enchantment was near the river?"

"He knows no more than we do, Mr. Muir," said Mrs. Charteris. "You will take your bed here, of course? No doubt it is a bonnie country, but mind you must look for nothing like the Clyde."

"Come along, Muir—I can't pretend to cope with *two* west country people," said Cuthbert. "Come, Lindsay will be waiting open-mouthed; and to-morrow we must make our pilgrimage together, and no one shall say I am ignorant of the enchanted palace any more. Come, Muir."

Next day the little party set out upon their brief voyage. This freedom of enjoyment, without stealth or remorse, was new to Harry. He breathed freely. It seemed to him, as from a listener, he became a partaker in the conversation of Lindsay and Charteris, that this was indeed a new life, a

bracing atmosphere, such as he had not known before. He became quiet at first—somewhat serious even—and looking up upon an April sky, and down upon the great stream chafing and foaming in the little vessel's course, there came upon him the abstraction of a gentle reverie, picturing the times to come !

The times to come ! Harry saw honour, wealth, independence, happiness in a bright crowd before him. He did not see, would not see—poor, rash, incautious heart !—that a grim shadow lowered upon them all, the shadow of his conquering sin—nor that this presence held the keys of the joyous home he dreamed of, and stood defiant on its threshold, blighting the flowers around the door. He never trembled for himself—poor Harry ! there seemed before him nothing but security and peace.

Overhead the clouds flew to the east like a pilgrimage of birds, sweeping over the breadth of heaven with a speed which made you dizzy ; and the mass of shadow threw a sable gleam on the water, as it dashed up its foaming mane, and shook it in the breeze. There are no clouds down the Firth where Inchkeith yonder burns and expands in the full sunshine ; but here we have only wayward glances of light, darting down upon us as if in play, which vanish in a moment into the pursuing cloud.

The little vessel leaps over the buoyant water with sometimes a mist of spray over her bows, and the passengers march in quick time along the decks, as if this swell and lengthened bound made music wild and martial, stirring the heart to quicker motion.

Now comes a sudden gleam, touching the russet outline of Inchcolm, as a painter would have it touched ; and as we pass, the light glides on before us, glittering upon the dewy slopes of Fife, and quivering along the waves, till it seems to sink there, like a golden arrow launched out of the heavens ; and the clouds again fly over us, away to the ungenial east.

St. Margaret's hope—Ah, Saxon Margaret, Atheling, Exile, Queen, and Saint ! was there hope in this quiet bay when the Scottish land stretched its brown arm of succour, and vowed its rude heart to thy service ? Not very far off is grey Dunfermline, forsaken of kings—and you may see a spire glitter on the further side of those withdrawing braes, pointing where the palace crumbles, and the wallflower and ivy flourish, over forlorn and solitary places, where queens had their bowers,

and kings their council-chamber. Here, too, is the royal ferry, with its narrow gateway, bringing to a point the broad Firth on either side; and we rustle past the sentinel-rock, which has looked down often in the old times upon the passing boats of queens, and dash with a bound into the free course once more; past little busy ports, and slumbering villages, past the great houses in their nest of trees—till brave old Demyet bows his stately head to us among the clouds, and the sun breaks out triumphant over the crowned rock of Stirling, and we glide into this silvery maze, radiant with flying lights and shadows—the links of Forth.

Here, by the side of the water, a great saugh tree droops its long locks, and trails them on the stream; behind it are a heavy mass of alders—by its side a hawthorn slowly whitening with its fragrant blossoms—and above the alders you can see a regular line of elm and beech, marshalled in fair succession, which seem to form a mall or avenue on the river's side. Beyond all appear the roof and gables of a hidden house. You cannot tell either size or form in the passing glimpse you gain of it from the river, but the heart of Harry Muir beats high as his eye falls on this home—a home it must be, for smoke curls from the chimneys, and a boat lies softly rocking on the water at the foot of the saugh tree.

"Neighbours," said Harry to himself, under his breath; "and I, too, must have a boat for Lettie and Rose."

"Mr. Muir," said Lindsay, bending forward with a smile, "that is Allenders."

The heir started violently. With an eager look he tried to penetrate the network of boughs and opening leaves, and failing that, followed with his eyes the very smoke as it curled away into the clouds. His heart beat so loudly that, for a moment, it made him sick.

"Allenders!—my home, *their* home!" murmured Harry; and he felt his breast swell as if with a rising sob.

A drive of a few miles from Stirling brought them to the other side of Allenders. There was less wood there, and the view was towards the wide strath in which lies Bannockburn. But Harry had not time to look at the prospect without—there was something, at the moment, greatly more interesting to him in the grey gables and dilapidated rooms within.

The house was not large, but it was tall, with windows specked over it in all corners, without an attempt at regularity; and on the eastern side was a curious little turret,

obtruding itself abruptly from the wall, and throwing up a spear point, now black and tarnished, over the heads of the high trees.

The door was opened to them tardily by an old man, who did not seem at all desirous that they should penetrate beyond the threshold. This custodier of the house of Allenders was thin and shrivelled, and had a face dingy with age and smoke, the small features of which seemed to have shrunk and crept together, under the touch of time. A few thin, white hairs strayed over his head, diverging from the crown in all directions with genuine independence; and his dress was of homespun blue, with great ribbed stockings and buckled shoes. Those poor, thin, angular limbs seemed to bend any way with the stiff facility of wooden joints; and as he dangled his lean arms by his side, and gazed with light-grey unmeaning eyes into their faces, it seemed as if the chill winter of years and poverty had frozen his very soul.

"You must let us in to see the house, my man," said Lindsay, briskly. "This is the young laird I have brought with me. Do you think he's like the old Allenders, Dragon?—you should know them well."

"Whilk ane is it, Mr. Lindsay—the muckle ane or the little ane?" asked the old man.

Now, Harry was by no means little. He did not at all relish the adjective.

"This is Mr. Muir—Allenders of Allenders," said Lindsay, hastily. "Come in; I'll be your guide, and Dragon here will overlook us, and see we take nothing away."

They entered a small square hall, dimly lighted, at the further end of which was a stone staircase of good proportions: but the walls were black with the dust of years, and the oak banisters of the stairs were broken and dilapidated. It had a dreary, deserted, uninhabitable look; and Harry, quickly impressed for good or evil, was half inclined to think Mrs. Rodgers' little parlour a brighter home than this after all.

Lindsay opened quickly, and with the air of one thoroughly acquainted with the house, which, however, he had only once seen before, one of the dim oak doors which opened into the hall. Within was a wainscoted parlour of good dimensions, with one small window in the great blank of its side wall, and one squeezed into a corner beside the fire-place. The carpet was so worn that pattern and colours were alike indiscernible, and dark curtains of faded purple-crimson hung over the dingy

windows. A long dining-table, polished and glimmering, caught one ray of the sunshine without, and carried it down the narrow length of the apartment to the old fashioned side-board at the end ; but save for this, the place looked as desolate as could be imagined. Lindsay turned round at the door with the air of an exhibitor, and something of the feeling ; for though himself, at the first glance, had thought all this very chill and miserable, he looked unconsciously for satisfaction from Harry. Harry did not say a word. Alas ! the house of enchantment—the fairy palace ! The reality was a very different thing from the dream.

Cuthbert went quickly to the nearest window, and drew away with more energy than was needful the jealous curtain.

“ Another window here to keep this one company, and some pictures on these grim panels, and brighter furniture—you will make this room the pleasantest of winter parlours, Muir. One can have no idea of what it will be, from its appearance just now.”

“ Anither window ! ” exclaimed the old man, who had followed them. “ Would ye break the guid wall, ye wasteful prodigal ? Mr. Lindsay, is’t this ane ? ” and he pointed his finger wrathfully at Cuthbert.

“ No, no,” said Harry Muir, with restored good-humour ; “ we must take your counsel since you like the walls so well. But what is your name ? What did you call him, Mr. Lindsay ? ”

“ They ca’ me Dragon,” said the warden of Allenders, vacantly. “ That is, I’m meaning my name’s Edom Comrie ; but I never hear onybody have the civility to ca’ me aught but Dragon. Put in anither window ! What would ye do that for, I would like to ken ? Do ye mean to say that what was licht enough for the auld Allenders, is no litch enough for the like of you ? You can wear spectacles if your vision is failing. I do it mysel’ ; but what for wad ye break the guid bonnie wa’ that might withstand the French for a nonsense window ? And there’s a bonnie bush a’ fu’ o’ white roses, in their season, leaning on the house close by there. Would ye tramp down my bonnie lady rose for your mason work ? Mr. Lindsay, is’t no again the law ? ”

“ But what if we brought a bonnie Lady Rose to sit at the new window, and look out upon the flowers ! ” said Cuthbert with a quick blush. “ When Allenders brings his family home, he’ll bring ladies here ; and flowers, you know, never thrive

without light. You would not show yourself a dragon to the ladies, Adam—the first time they heard of you, too.”

The old man chuckled a strange laugh.

“He thinks *I’m* heeding about ladies—*me!* and you’ll nane of you be learned, I reckon; for if ye were, there’s a routh o’ grand books ben the house—I whiles read in them mysel, and they are a’ guid reading and profitable. When I come on an ill ane, I kindle my fire wi’t. I laid my hand on ane yestreen, that’s nae better than it should be, in my judgment; but it was uncommon diverting, and I just laid it by again, for my ain carnal pleasure—for I’m no abune the like o’ that, though I’m auld. Come away, Allenders—if you are Allenders; I’ll let you see the book, and like a good laddie, ye’ll take nae heed of yon birkie and his windows.”

The young men followed their conductor in high good-humour. He had quite neutralized the melancholy appearance of the house.

Opposite the dining-parlour was a much smaller apartment, heavy and dark with books. Into the sombre twilight of this room no stray sunbeam wandered. High trees closed it round without, and great book-cases, dusty and crowded, oppressed the wall within. A single old print of some obscure Stirlingshire divine, long since forgotten, hung over the mantel-piece, and a much-worn leathern chair stood before a little writing-table in front of the fire-place. A window-seat, cushioned and covered with hard crimson moreen, occupied the recess of the window; but from this you only looked out upon the damp outline of a neglected flower-bed, covered with rank vegetation, and upon the close screen of trees, which bent round it on every side.

“Man, I dinna *envie* ye the land!” exclaimed the harmless Dragon of Allenders, “but I div *envie* ye the books; and being a callant, ye’ll no ken how to make a right use of them. Now isna this a grand room? I’ll warrant ye never were in a muckle house like this afore?”

“It is light we want—nothing but light. It is the gloom which makes these rooms look so dreary,” said Charteris, sympathetically, beholding the chill which again fell over Harry.

Harry went to the window, and looked out. Why *they* would be buried here—and the good fortune was a piece of penance after all.

“You should give me another five hundred a-year for con-

sending to live in this place, Mr. Lindsay," he said in almost an irritated tone.

Poor Harry had a weakness of thinking that disagreeable things were somebody's fault. He was quite impatient with Lindsay and Charteris. He felt as if they had deluded him.

"Dr. Allenders in Stirling would not think so," said Lindsay, in his turn a little offended. "I dare say you might find a Jacob among them eager enough to bargain for a birth-right."

"See, my man, here's the book," said the old servant, shuffling up to Harry. "Ye needna say onything to the minister about it, if ye should happen to fall in with him; for, maybe, he mightna think it very richt for a man of my years; and I'll put it ben the house on the hob to kindle the fire when I'm done reading it; but it's awfu' entertaining. See, look at it; but I canna ca' ye Allenders—Allenders was an auld man, and you're only a laddie. What do they ca' ye by your christened name?"

"My name is Harry Muir," was the instant reply; for Harry had unconsciously a feeling of disgust now at the very sound of Allenders.

"Hairy! What garred them ca' ye Hairy? it's no a canny name for a laird of Allenders; and there's never ane been called by it since the time the lady was lost; but I hope ye'll come to nae skaith, for you're no an ill lad, judging by your looks. And ye have leddies coming, have ye? What right has the like of you to leddies?"

"My sister and my wife, Adam," said Harry, with a smile.

"His wife! hear till him! Will ye tell me that the like of this bit callant's married? Sirs, I never was married mysel."

The poor old feeble Dragon looked round as he spoke with the air of a hero, and lifting up his shrivelled hands, exhibited himself complacently. But as he did this, his book fell, and stooping to pick it up, he presented it to Harry, with an unmeaning smile.

Poor Dragon! it was a very rare and fine old edition of Shakspeare, which his rough handling had by no means improved. Harry was not sufficiently learned to know that it was curious and valuable; but he saw its great age and antique appearance, and thought it might be better employed than kindling Adam's fire.

"When you are done with it, keep it for me, Dragon," said Harry; "I should like to look at it myself."

The old man began to shake his head, slowly at first, but with a gradually increasing rapidity of motion.

"I'm far from clear that it's right to give the like o' this to young folk; it's only those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, the Apostle says; and you are but a babe to be fed on the sincere milk. How mony sisters have ye, Mr. Hairy?"

"Three, Dragon."

"Three sisters and ae wife! four women intill a house at ance! Come your ways up the muckle stair," said the old man, hastily, "and see the bonnie rooms we've gotten to lodge them a' in; and plenty of light and plenty of windows, for a' yon birkie says."

The young men followed in silence.

On the second story there was a multitude of small rooms. One of them, over the library, which they entered first, disclosed to Harry's half-reluctant eyes the prettiest of little silvery burns, sparkling away into the river, under the shelter of those overgrown trees which made the under rooms so melancholy.

"Here we are," said Lindsay, triumphantly. "How you may feel on the matter, I can't tell, Mr. Muir, but this seems very fine to me; and the windows behind look out on the Forth."

Harry was half-ashamed of his ill-humour, but for the moment he could not conquer it.

"We'll give this room to the bonniest ane," said the Dragon, with his feeble smile. "Whilk ane's that, Mr. Hairy? and you'll no be for ony mair windows for your Lady Rose," added the old man, turning sharply round on Cuthbert.

Cuthbert had been investigating the apartment behind.

"The very brightest of drawing-rooms," said the advocate, with a warmth which made Harry still more ashamed of himself. "You have nothing to do but take down this partition, and throw the two into one room."

The poor old guardian of these dim walls clenched his hand, and shook it with feeble vehemence in Cuthbert's face:

"Would ye put such radical notions into the innocent lad's head? Would ye daur?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

Lord, what a nothing is this little span
 We call a man!
 How slight and short are his resolves at longest,
 How weak at strongest!

QUARLES.

CUTHBERT CHARTERIS returned to Edinburgh that night, but not until he had first made a rude outline—he was no artist, but he could use his pencil enough for this—of Allenders, with its eccentric turret and shady mall, and the boat—a very crazy, incompetent boat as it turned out—lying under the saugh tree upon the quiet water. He showed it to Harry, as they eagerly consulted about the necessary improvements, and Harry thought it quite a remarkable production; but Cuthbert greatly doubted as he enclosed it to Martha Muir. The deed almost lost its original intention of simple kindness, as he pondered over it, and feared that *they* might think his drawing a very poor affair; but it was sent at last.

Harry remained with Lindsay in Stirling. It was necessary to see the family of Allenders residing there, who, failing Harry and his household, were next heirs; and some legal forms had also to be gone through. Harry had recovered his usual spirits; he was excited with his new position, with his proposed improvements, and even with his inn lodgings; and while Lindsay laboured through some necessary processes for his enfranchisement, Harry strayed out to see the town. He saw the town, it was very true. He climbed to the bastions of the lofty castle, and looked round him east and west. To the blue Highland hills in the distance—to Demayet and his brother Ochils, glooming in brown shadows over the country at his feet—to the silvery maze of the Forth, wantoning in and out between those verdant banks as if he were fain of a pretext to linger at every corner, because he loved the way so well—and to the broad strath of Bannockburn, stealing away into those great lines of cloud, which seemed to carry its gently sloping plain into the distant sky. Harry looked upon them all, and mused and lingered, thinking pleasant thoughts. Then he saw the lights begin to gleam, one after another, in the town below, and he sauntered down to walk through the

streets with their pleasant, quiet, leisurely stir, and then to return to his hotel.

But it was very late when Harry returned to his hotel—and he was “indisposed,” and would not see the wondering Lindsay, who only left his papers for the supper he had ordered, when he heard that Mr. Muir had already gone to his room, and was “indisposed.” Lindsay was puzzled and offended. He could not make out what this sudden indisposition could mean.

Poor Harry! next morning he rose late, with an aching head and a pained heart. He forgot at first when he woke how he had concluded the last evening; but as the remembrance dawned upon him, he wrung his hands and groaned aloud. What could he do? how could he defend himself against this overpowering weakness? He threw himself upon his face, and prayed in an agony of self-reproach and shame, for strength, for deliverance. Alas! this great inheritance, this fair new life—had he put the stain of his infirmity upon its promise already.

Lindsay had breakfasted some time before Harry made his appearance in their sitting-room; and now sat at a window, reading a newspaper, and looking very grave and stately. A ceremonious salutation passed between them; and Harry, sick, despondent, and miserable, sat down at the table. As he loitered over his coffee, and pushed his plate away from him with loathing, there was perfect silence in the room, except for the rustling of Lindsay’s paper, and his own restless motions.

Poor Harry was utterly cast down, but his humiliation struggled with a fierce irritability; and Lindsay never moved his paper, but his companion felt the strongest impulse to snatch it from his hand, and trample on it, as if the indifference which could content itself with a newspaper, while he was suffering thus, was a positive injury to him.

When he had finished breakfast, he remained still leaning his head upon his hand, and idly brooding over the disordered table. He did not feel any inclination to go out, he had indeed nothing present before him, but a diseased image of himself overspread with blank despondency, and clouded with rising ill-humour. He had never felt this so much before; for always before he had to justify himself, or to melt in sympathy with those tears of yearning love and pity which had been wept over him so often. He scarcely had known till

now how bitterly and harshly the soul can condemn itself, alone.

"When you are at leisure, Mr. Muir," said Lindsay, coldly, "I shall be glad if you will accompany me to call on Dr. Allenders. He was here last night, having received a note I wrote him from Edinburgh; and as he did not see you then—"

"Of course, I am ready—of course," said Harry, starting up hastily. "It was impossible I could know when Dr. Allenders intended to call. But I am quite at your command, Mr. Lindsay. Does this man mean to dispute my claim?"

"This man is a person of the highest character," said Lindsay, with his stiff gravity. "Having seen the documents, he does not intend to put any obstacle in your way, Mr. Muir. By the bye, I do not know whether you mean to assume the name of the family which you succeed. It is not a condition of the will certainly, but it was implied. Shall I present you to the Doctor as Mr. Allenders?"

"No, no, not yet," said the conscience-stricken Harry. "Not yet—not to-day. No, no—let it be a better time."

These words were spoken incoherently, but Lindsay understood them, and his heart was softened.

They went out, and the conversation gradually became less constrained and more familiar; but Harry painfully recognised the places which he had passed during the ramble of the previous night, and vowed in his heart, as the bright day without restored in some degree his failing spirit and courage, that never more, never again, should these inanimate things remind him of temptations yielded to, and resolutions broken. Poor Harry! a very short time makes him as confident as ever; and when they have reached the doctor's door, he has again begun to look forward fearlessly into the future, and to bring no self-distrust or trembling out of the past.

The doctor's house is on the outskirts of the town, a square, comfortable habitation, with a radiant glimpse from its windows of the mazes of the river and the far-off hills. Upon the door glitters a brass plate, bearing the name of John Allenders, M. D.; and Dr. John Allenders seems to be in comfortable circumstances, for a spruce boy in buttons opens the door, and they are shown into a handsome library, which a strong, peculiar fragrance, and a suspicious glass door with little red curtains, proclaims to be near the surgery; but Dr.

John has a good collection of books, and altogether appears to Harry an exceedingly creditable relation, and one with whom even the heir of Allenders may be sufficiently well pleased to count kin.

It is some time before Dr. John makes his appearance; but Lindsay, who stands opposite the glass door catches a glimpse of a dissipated-looking head, in great shirt collars, stealthily peeping through the red curtains at Harry, and making faces with an expression of unmitigated disgust. But he has scarcely time to notice this, when a shadow falls upon the door, and with a solemn step, Dr. Allenders enters the library.

He is a common-place looking man, with great dark eyes, which project almost their whole round from under the puckered eyelid. It is curious to notice how those eyes move, as if they were touched by strings or wires behind; but the rest of his face is very tolerable, and he looks what he is, a thoroughly respectable person, driving his gig, and having money in the bank; and understanding himself to be a responsible man, owing society, in right of his position in it, ever so many observances and proprieties.

Close behind Dr. Allenders, comes the dissipated head and the shirt collars, which just now made faces at Harry Muir. The owner of the head stumbles up the two steps which connect the lower level of the surgery with that of this more dignified apartment, and enters the room with a swagger. He has eyes like the doctor's, and a long, sallow face, encircled by the luxuriant brushwood which repeats under his chin the shaggy forest of hair which is the crown and glory on his head. He wears a very short grey coat, a coloured shirt, and an immense neck-cloth; and there enters with him into the room an atmosphere of smoke, tinted with many harmonizing odours, which envelopes his whole person like a separate world.

Harry turned round with slightly nervous haste as the doctor made his appearance. The doctor bowed, and held out his hand with a frankness half real, half assumed; but Harry's hand fell as it advanced to meet that of Dr. Allenders, while Dr. Allenders' son uttered a coarse exclamation of surprise and recognition. Poor Harry! his face became purple with very shame and anger—for this coarse prodigal had been one of his boon companions on the previous night.

"Met before?" said the doctor, inquiringly, as Harry stimulated by the rude laugh of young Allenders, and the serious

wonder of Lindsay, made a strong effort to recover himself "Seen my son in some other place, Mr. Muir? I am glad of that, for blood is thicker than water; and though we have lost an estate through your means, my young friend, I hope we'll have grace given us not to be envious, but to rejoice in your exaltation as if it were our own; besides that, it would have been very inconvenient to me—extremely inconvenient for my professional duties—to have lived five miles out of town; and then the house is such an old tumble-down affair. So I wish you joy, most heartily, Mr. Muir. The income of Allenders' estate would have been small compensation to *me*, and Gilbert here has not settled to the harness yet; so we've no reason to complain—not a shadow. Pray sit down—or will you come up-stairs and see my wife and my daughters? Oh, we'll not disturb them; and being relations, they have heard of you, Mr. Muir—I told them myself yesterday—and would like to see the new heir."

"I say Muir, my boy, I'm delighted it's you," said Mr. Gilbert Allenders, thrusting forward a great bony, tanned hand, ornamented with a large ring. "Pleasant night, last night, wasn't it? Glad to see we've got another good fellow among us. Come along up-stairs and see the girls."

Mr. Gilbert Allenders had a rough voice, with the coarsest of provincial accents; and to mend the matter, Mr. Gilbert put himself to quite extraordinary pains to speak English, emitting his r's with painful distinctness, and now and then dropping a necessary h. It had been a matter of considerable study to him, and he was very complacent about his success.

Harry submitted with a bad grace to shake hands, and unconsciously drew nearer to Lindsay.

But Lindsay, who only smiled at the vulgar Mr. Gilbert, instinctively drew himself up, and turned his face from Harry. Harry Muir for himself was nothing to the young lawyer; but Lindsay felt personal offence mingle in the contempt with which he perceived how his client chose his company—leaving himself solitary in their inn, to go and seek out a party which could admit this Gilbert Allenders. Henceforth, Mr. Lindsay might be man of business to the new heir—friend he could never be.

"I must be in Edinburgh this afternoon," said Lindsay coldly. "Do you accompany me, Mr. Muir? for if you do not, I have accomplished all that is necessary here, I fancy, and may take my leave."

Harry hesitated for a moment, his better feelings struggling with false shame and pride; but lifting his eyes suddenly, he encountered the derisive smile of Gilbert Allenders, and took in with one rapid glance all the characteristics of his new-found kinsman. These had more effect on his susceptibility than either reason or repentance. He did not decide on returning in the lawyer's respectable society, because he feared for his own weakness, if he permitted himself to remain here alone. No, often though Harry's weakness had been demonstrated even to his own conviction, it was not this; but what a knowledge of himself could not do, disgust with Gilbert Allenders did. He answered hastily that he too would return at once, and persuading Lindsay to remain and accompany him up-stairs to the drawing-room where Mrs. Allenders and her daughters sat in state expecting their visit, they at length left the house together, declining the proffered escort of Mr. Gilbert.

But Harry did not escape without a galling punishment for the previous night's folly. Gilbert Allenders, seeing how he winced under it, plied him with allusion after allusion. "Last night, you recollect?" and with the most malicious perseverance recalled its speeches, its laughter, its jokes and its noise, assuming too an ostentation of familiarity and good-fellowship which Harry could scarcely restrain his fury at. The effect was good and bad; on the one hand, Harry vowed to himself fiercely that he never would put himself in the power of such a man again: on the other, he forgot how he himself had wasted the fair summer night begun with pleasant thoughts and blessings; how he had desecrated and polluted what should have been its pure and healthful close. He forgot his repentance. He felt himself an ill-used man.

But he left Stirling that night with the half-mollified Lindsay. So much at least was gained.

CHAPTER XIX.

Fair gladsome waking thoughts, and joyous dreams more fair!

CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

IN the parlor at Port Dundas the window is open, the little muslin blind waves in the soft air, and sounds steal in drowsily through the sunshine from without. At the table sits Agnes.

in her best gown, writing a letter to Harry. Violet, in a corner, stands erect with her hands behind her, defying Rose, who sits with great dignity in the arm-chair to puzzle her with that spelling-book. Little Harry, now beginning to walk, creeps about the floor at his own sweet will; and indeed they are all idling but Martha, who still works at the "opening," though you perceive she does it slowly, and has not the keen interest in "getting on" which she had a week ago.

Agnes writes rather laboriously—she is no penwoman; and what she writes is just about nothing at all—a domestic letter, full of implied tenderness and exuberant hopes, through which you can scarcely see the sober and solemn solicitude which has made Harry's wife a woman deeper than her nature, and elder than her years. But the heart of the young wife is very light now, and she looks at the sleeve of her best gown with a smile, as she pauses to arrange the next sentence, and beats upon her hand with the feather of her pen. Little Harry seated at her feet, which he makes a half-way house between two corners, tears away with appetite at a great orange, refreshing himself, before, on hands and knees, he starts upon another circumnavigation.

Looking down upon him lovingly the young mother concocts her next sentence with triumphant success; and you can guess, without looking over her shoulder, what a pretty outline grows upon her paper, under that inspired pen, which can write so quickly now. It is not a daguerreotype of little Harry which his mother will send to his father; but indeed one cannot tell what height of excellence and warm expression this very daguerreotype can attain to, when the sunshine which makes the portraiture is not the light of common day, but of love.

Nor are you working either, little dark-haired Violet! Alas, it is no sensible educational purpose which has carried you into the corner, with one defiant foot planted firmly before the other, and those restless hands crossed demurely behind. Not a respectable lesson gravely administered and received, as lessons should be, but a challenge proudly given to Rose to "fickle" you, who are very confident in this particular of spelling that you cannot be "fickled." A slight curve upon the brow of Rose, as she hunts up and down through all those pages for hard words, intimates that she is a little "fickled" herself; and Violet raises her head more proudly, and Rose laughs with greater mirth as each successive word is achieved,

though now and then the elder trifier discovers that she is idle, and wonders why it is, and remembers the cause which has made their industry less urgent, with new smiles and joy.

But Martha still works at her "opening." This, the last which they are ever to do, Harry says, is a collar very elaborately embroidered, which Martha resolves shall be bestowed on Agnes, as one memorial of those toilsome days when they are past. The sterner lines in Martha's face have relaxed, and her eyelids droop softly with a grateful pleasant weariness over her subdued eyes. Sometimes the curves about her mouth move with a momentary quiver, as though a few tears were about to fall; but the tears never fall. And sometimes she lays down her work on her knee, and droops her head forward, and looks up under her eyelashes with a smile at the young mother, or at the two household flowers. These are long, loving, lingering glances, not bright but dim with the unusual gentleness of this unusual rest.

The sounds without do not strike upon your ear harshly, as sounds do in winter, for this April day is warm and genial, like a day in June, and has in it a natural hush and calm, which softens every distant voice. Chief of all passing voices come gaily through the sunshine and the open window, the song of Maggie McGillivray. She is sitting again on her mother's step, with the full sunshine, which she does not at all heed, streaming upon her brown, wholesome, comely face. Her scissors flash in the sun, her yellow hair burns; but Maggie only throws over her head the finished end of her web, and clips and sings with unfailing cheerfulness. This time it is not the "Lea Rig," but "Kelvin Grove," to which the shears march and keep time; but it is impossible to tell what a zest it gives to idleness, when one can look out upon industry so sunshiny and alert as this.

"Perfunctory—p, e, r, f, u, n, e, t—Eh! Rose yonder's Postie, with a letter," cried Violet, out of breath.

"It's sure to be from Harry, he's always so thoughtful," said the young wife; "run and get it, Violet. I wonder if he has seen the house yet—I wonder if he has settled when we're all to go—I wonder—but to think of him writing again to-day! Poor Harry! he would think we would be anxious, Martha."

"Here's three; everybody but me gets a letter," cried Violet, entering with her hands full. "Martha, Postie says this should have come yesterday, but it had no number; and

here's one from my uncle. May I open Uncle Sandy's letter, Martha?"

But Violet's question was not answered. Harry's letter was a large one, a family epistle addressed to Martha, enclosed within the love-letter which Harry's still fresh and delicate affection sent to his wife. But while Agnes ran over hers alone, a flush of delight and expectation making her smile radiant, Rose looking over Martha's shoulder, and Violet standing at her knee, possessed themselves of the contents of the larger letter; so that Agnes, roused at the end of her own to kindred eagerness about this, started up to join them, as Rose exclaimed: "A boat on the water," and Violet cried "Eh, Agnes, a wee burn," in the same breath.

And then Martha smilingly commanded the little crowd which pressed around her to sit down quietly, and hear her read; and Violet added with authority:

"Agnes, Rose, you're to go away. Martha will read it out loud;" but, notwithstanding, still obtruded her own small head between the letter of Harry and the eyes of her elder sister.

And Martha did read "out loud," all the others still continuing to bend over her shoulder, and to utter suppressed exclamations as their eyes ran, faster than Martha's voice, over the full page. The mall, the boat, the burn, the partitions to be thrown down, the windows to be opened, the painting and gilding and furnishing which filled Harry's mind with occupation, produced the pleasantest excitement in the family. Those two girls, Agnes and Rose—for the wife was little more mature than her young sister—paused at the end of every sentence to clap their hands, and exclaim with pleasure; but Violet's small head remained steady under shadow of Martha's shoulder, and she read on.

"I have the accumulated rents of two years—nine hundred pounds—to begin with," wrote Harry; "you may fancy how much improvement we may get out of such a sum as that; and I am resolved that the house shall be a pleasant house to us all, and like what a *home* should be, if anything I can do, will make it so. We must have a new boat, instead of this old crazy one, and will be obliged to have a vehicle of some kind. Violet must go to Stirling to school, so we'll need a pony for her (Violet laughed aloud), and Agnes and Rose and you, my dear Martha, must have some kind of carriage; however, you shall decide yourselves about that. But this thousand pounds,

you see, will enable us to begin in proper style, and that is a great matter.

"I have just seen a family of Allenders in Stirling, respectable vulgar people, with a dissipated son, who took upon him to be more intimate with me than I was at all disposed for. I am afraid I shall be rude to this Gilbert Allenders, if he continues to press himself upon me; however, when you are all yonder, everything will go well."

Poor Harry! It was a consolation to him to condemn Gilbert Allenders; it seemed to take a weight from his own conscience; disgust for his dissipated kinsman stood Harry in stead as disgust for dissipation itself, and he took the salve to his heart, and was comforted.

"Martha, will a pony carry two folk?" asked Violet, anxiously. "Yes, I mind—for ladies rode upon a pillion langsyne."

"And what two folk would you have it carry, Lettie?" asked Rose.

"Me and Katie Calder. Martha, will you let Katie come?—for Auntie Jean's ill to her; my uncle told Harry that, Martha."

"Ask Agnes," said Martha, with a smile; "I am only Harry's sister and your sister, Lettie; but Agnes is lady of Allenders now; you must ask Agnes."

The little wife grew red and white, and laughed hysterically; then she sank down on the floor at Martha's feet, and clasped her arms around the elder sister's waist, and wept quietly with her face hidden. It was too much for them all.

"And it's an enchanted castle, and there's a Dragon in it," cried Violet joyously; "but, Rosie, Rosie, there should be a knight. Oh! I ken who it is—I ken who it is; it's Mr. Charteris!"

"Lettie, what nonsense!" exclaimed Rose, who at that moment became extremely upright and proper.

"I ken; you're the princess, Rosie, and Mr. Charteris is the knight; and maybe there's fairies about the burn! Oh! I wish I was there!—me and little Katie Calder!"

Martha lifted the other letters from the table; they had been forgotten in the interest of this. One of them was from Uncle Sandy; the other was a note from Cuthbert, enclosing his sketch—an extremely brief note, saying little—yet Rose examined it over her sister's shoulder stealthily, while the others looked at the drawing. There was nothing peculiar

about the hand ; and Rose did not understand the art of glean-
ing traits of character out of hair-strokes—yet her eyes went
over it slowly, tracing the form of every letter. Poor Cuth-
bert ! he thought this same Rose would be very much inter-
ested about his drawing ; it seemed for the moment that these
plain characters occupied her more.

CHAPTER XX.

A pair of friends—though I was young
And Matthew seventy-three.

WORDSWORTH.

“ Eh, wee Hairy ! ” cried Miss Aggie Rodger, “ your faither’s
a muckle man noo ; do you ken that, my pet ? and you’ll ride
in a coach, and get a grand powney o’ your ain, and eat gros-
sets and pu’ flowers a’ the simmer through ; do you hear that,
my wee boy ? But ye’ll have to gang away, Hairy, and what’ll
we a’ do wantin’ ye ? ”

“ It’s me that’s to get the pony,” said Violet. “ I’m to
ride into Stirling to the school every day, and I want Martha
to buy a pillion for Katie Calder, and then, Miss Aggie, I can
sit before, and Katie behind, like the lady in Lochinvar ; but
it’s me that’s to get the pony.”

“ Preserve me, what a grand lady ! ” said Miss Aggie,
throwing up little Harry in her arms ; “ but the wee boy’s the
heir for a’ that—are ye no, Hairy ? ”

“ But I want to ken how we’re to get to Stirling,” said
Violet. “ I ken about the Castle and the Ladies’ Rock, and
all the places where the Douglas played, and where Lufra
chased the deer, and King James coming down the High
Street, too ; but Mr. John, will you tell me how we’re to get
to Stirling ? ”

“ I never was there myself, Lettie,” said the idle man ;
“ but there’s a map of Scotland in that auld book—see, down
yonder in the corner, behind ‘ Hervey’s Meditations ’—that’s
it—and we’ll look and see.”

The book was a dingy and tattered one, and beside it lay
a very old copy of Young’s “ Night Thoughts,” which Violet
brought with her in her hand.

"See, now, this is the road," said the poor, good-natured Johnnie, with whom Lettie was an especial favourite, as he spread out the worn map on his knee, and taking a pin from the lappel of his coat, traced with it the route. "But your brother, you know, Lettie, went to Edinburgh first, and then sailed up here—and this is Stirling."

"Eh, how the water runs out and in!" exclaimed Violet; "and we have a boat all to ourselves. Mr. John, will you tell me what this book is—is it good for reading?" and Violet contemplated, with a slightly puzzled expression, the dense pages of blank verse in which there appeared no story to catch her eye, or interest.

"Very good for reading," answered the oracular Mr. John; "but now, Lettie, put the books back, and run down to Mrs. McGarvie's, like a good girl, and bring me a new pipe—run, Lettie!"

There was a strange alliance between the child and the man. Lettie, not always very tolerant of messages, put down the books without a murmur, and obeyed.

It was now May, and the day was hot and slumbrous. Miss Jeanie Rodger was at the warehouse, carrying back the work; Miss Aggie making boisterous fun with little Harry at the window; while proud, pensive, faded Miss Rodger sat very unpresentable in another room, repairing worn finery, which never could have been suitable for her, and was suitable for no one now.

The mother, worn out by two or three successive encounters with tax-gatherers, whose visits she bitterly resented at all times, and among whom she classed the collectors of those innocent water and gas accounts, which lay upon the "bunker" in the kitchen, was sleeping away her wrath and fatigue; every thing was still in the house, except the crowing of little Harry. And little Harry's mother and aunts were making a new frock for him in the parlour—a work which, for very joy, made slow progress: they had so many things to think and talk about.

Looking into this pleasant work-room to see that all was right, before she obeyed the command of Mr. John, Violet went bounding down the stair, and out into the street.

Mrs. McGarvie's Tiger sat painfully on the very narrow step of the door, where he could be shaded from the sun; sat very upright and prim, poor fellow, compelled by this circumscribed space. Mrs. McGarvie's pretty Helen, with her beautiful

hair and bare feet, on short time at the mill, lovingly clipped with Maggie McGillivray across the way, but was very languid under the full sunshine, and grew quite ashamed of herself as she watched with awe and admiration the vigorous shears of her companion; while Mrs. McGarvie in the easy dishabille of a loose short gown, shook her loose clenched hand at her daughter from the threshold, and called her an idle cuttie at the top of her voice.

It was a drowsy day, and some one looking very brown and dusty, came toiling down the sunny, unshaded road.

"Eh, it's Harry!" cried Violet Muir—and affectionately grasping the pipe in one hand, she ran up the road to secure Harry with the other.

"Who's to smoke the pipe? Lettie, you must go no more messages like this, for you're a young lady now," said Harry, drawing himself up. Is it for that idle fellow, John Rodger? What a shame, Lettie!"

"He's my friend; I like him best," said Violet, decidedly.

"He's a mean fellow!" said Harry. "See that you don't go any where for him again!"

For Harry had just now been a little irritated. Some one had met him, who did not know his dignity, and who in the old days had been the superior of Mr. Buchanan's clerk; but having extinguished his wrath by this condemnation of poor John Rodger, and highly amused to notice the violent flush of anger which rose upon the face of Lettie, Harry entered the house in great spirits.

"He's turning steady, that lad," said Mrs. McGarvie, looking after him, with a sigh. "I'm sure it's a great blessing; and a' body mends o' their ill courses but our guidman."

Harry had come by the coach; the economic tardiness of the canal was not necessary to Harry now; and except that he was sunburnt, and hot, and dusty, the quick, inquisitive eye of Rose decided in a moment that there was nothing in his appearance to-day to rouse Martha's suspicions.

"Don't let Lettie run about so," said Harry, when their first greetings were over. "It is great presumption of those Rodgers; don't let her go errands for them. Lettie is clever, Martha; we must make something of her. And now, when will you all go home?"

"Is that all that remains now, Harry?" exclaimed Agnes, clapping her hands. "May we go at once? Is it so near as that?"

"Well, I don't think you should," said Harry. "Let me get all the alterations made, and the place furnished, and then you can come. But Charteris said he was sure you would like better to be there at once, and have a hand in the improvements; so I promised him to give you your choice."

"Oh, surely! Let us go now," said Agnes.

"Eh, I would like!" echoed little Violet.

"But I should not like," said Harry. "I want you to go when the place is complete and worthy of you. If you saw it now, you would think it a dingy, melancholy desert; but just wait for a month or so! There is a good deal of wood to be cut down, and they tell me the estate may be much improved; and to have a thousand pounds to begin with, you know, is a great good fortune. There is a new church building close by—I think of giving them a hundred pounds, Martha."

"A hundred pounds!" exclaimed Agnes and Rose.

The eyes of both were wet. It was so great a gladness to be able to give such a gift, and then to propose it was so good of Harry! They were both overpowered with his liberality.

"A Syrian ready to perish was my father," said Martha, slowly. "Yes, it is very fit you should bring the handful of first-fruits; but bring it justly, Harry. Spare it. Do not give it to the church and spend it too."

"Martha is thinking of our old fifteen pounds a quarter," said Harry, gaily. "Martha forgets that you don't need to put off an account to pay your seat-rent now, Agnes. Why, only think of a thousand pounds—what a sum it is! It seems to me as if we could never spend it. Look here, Lettie."

And Harry triumphantly exhibited a hundred-pound note. No one present had ever seen such a one before; and simple Harry, with a touch of most innocent pride, had preferred this one piece of paper to the more useful smaller notes, simply to let them see it, and to dazzle their eyes with a whole hundred pounds of their own.

"Eh, Harry!" exclaimed Violet, with reverential eyes fixed on Harry's new pocket-book, "is't a' there?"

Harry laughed, and closed the book; but they all looked at it a little curiously, and even Agnes felt a momentary doubt as to whether a thousand—ay, or even a hundred—pounds were very safe in Harry's keeping.

"No, it's not all here," answered the heir; "it's all in the bank but this. Now, Agnes, am I not to have any tea? And we must consult about it all. The improvements will

cost some two hundred pounds ; then we'll say a hundred and fifty to furnish the drawing-room—that's very moderate. Then—there are already some things in the dining-room—say a hundred for that, and another hundred for the rest of the house. How much is that, Lettie ?”

Lettie was counting it up on her fingers.

“Eh, Harry, what a heap of siller !”

“Five hundred and fifty ; and this,” said Harry, complacently laying his finger on his pocket-book, “six ; and a hundred to the kirk, seven hundred and fifty ; and say fifty pounds for a good horse and Lettie's pony, and somewhere near a hundred for a carriage, and then—whew ! there's nothing left. I must begin to calculate again—a thousand pounds—”

“But, Harry, you said it was only nine hundred,” said Rose.

“Well, so it is—it's all the same. What's a hundred here or there ?” said Harry the Magnificent. “I must just make my calculation over again—that's all.”

“But can people encumbered as you are afford to keep a carriage on four hundred and fifty pounds a-year ?” asked Martha.

“Oh, not in the town, of course ; but the country is quite different. Besides, Allenders will improve to any extent ; and I suppose I may double my income very soon. Don't fear, Martha, we'll be very careful—oh, don't be afraid.”

And Harry sincerely believing that no one need be afraid, went on in his joyous calculations—beginning always, not a whit discouraged, when he discovered again and again that he was calculating on a greater sum than he possessed ; but it soon became very apparent, even with Harry's sanguine arithmetic, that it was by no means a difficult thing to spend a thousand pounds, and a slight feeling of discontent that it was not another thousand suddenly crossed the minds of all.

“I see,” said Harry, slowly, “it'll have to be fifty to the church, Martha. Fifty is as much as I can afford. It would not be just, to myself and to you all, to give more.”

Poor Harry ! The magnificence of liberality was easier to give up than the other magnificences on which he had set his heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

But hark you, Kate,
Whither I go, thither shall you go too;
To-day will I set forth, to-morrow you.

HENRY IV.

"WHAT could *you* do in Allenders? one never knows how to deal with you capricious women. Stay at home, Agnes, and manage your own department—it is impossible you could assist me, and you would only be a hindrance to work. Stay at home, I say, till the place is ready for you."

Agnes laid down the child softly upon the sofa where she was sitting, and answered nothing; but her face wore a look of resignation which Harry thought ostentatious, and which irritated him greatly, as indeed his little wife partly knew.

He started hastily from his seat with a contracted brow, and began to walk about the room, muttering something to himself about the impossibility of pleasing every body. Poor little Agnes was desperately exerting herself to swallow a sob; she did feel a little fretful and peevish, it was very true, but at the same time she honestly struggled to keep it down.

"Martha, say something," whispered Rose. "Harry is angry—speak to him, Martha."

But Martha sat still and said nothing—for Harry's magnificent intentions troubled his sister with an uneasy sense of dependence. It is oftentimes a greater exercise of generosity to receive than to bestow. Labouring for Harry would have seemed to Martha a thing so natural as never to disturb her everyday life for a moment; to be supported by Harry, called for a stronger exertion. But Harry's sister was of stouter spirit than Harry's wife. She preferred, even at a risk of great pain, to make trial quietly of this new life, rather than to say how irksome to her was the prospect of burdening her brother, and to undergo a scene of indignation, and grief, and reconciliation. Nevertheless, Martha felt her influence abridged, and was silent—for this fortune did not change her own position or that of her sisters. Harry and his wife alone were rightful sharers of this unexpected elevation, and Martha stepped

down from the elder sister's place, not without a struggle, and endeavoured to turn her eyes, which had so long expressed the distinct decisions of a separate will, towards the young irresolute pair beside her as to the heads of the house.

"Why don't you speak, Martha?" exclaimed Harry at last, noticing her silence with a renewed burst of impatience. "Why don't you say what you think at once, instead of sitting glooming at us all?"

"I do not speak because I begin now to be your dependant, Harry," said Martha, with harsh emphasis; "and especially in a matter where I and these bairns may restrict and hinder you, must now choose to listen to your decision, and not try to influence it. That is why I do not speak. But what I *think* is, that Agnes, since she wishes it, should go with you, and that we can remain to do all that is necessary here. Or I can take them home to Ayr—anywhere—and Agnes will like to be with you in your plannings and alterations, Harry. Why should she not go?"

"A dependant!" Harry looked very indignant and injured.

"Stay," said Martha. "Nothing more of this. A woman needs to be so. I am willing; but I prefer that nothing should be said of it, Harry, especially now, when I am scarcely accustomed to the change."

A long silence followed, and each individual heart there was busy with its own proper thoughts. Martha, ever proud and harsh, repeated to herself the many necessities which compelled her to remain an inmate of Harry's house, and to relinquish the work by which she had hitherto supported herself—she, who, small as her opportunities were, had always conferred, but never received, the benefits of ordinary life; and there came vividly upon her memory those old dreams of youth, in which she imagined herself the support, the guardian, the protector of the orphan children who were her charge in the world. Now she was Harry's dependant sister, curbing and burdening his hands, and restraining the harmless indulgences he longed for. Martha was not content, not willing, not ready, like a gentler woman, to take upon herself this gracious yoke of love, and receive with sweet and becoming humility the gifts which she could not refuse; but she bent her stubborn neck to them, and reminded herself of her new position, with a strong resolve to do all its duties—chiefest of all to cover over in her own heart, so that no one could discern it, the bitterness she felt.

Harry, pleased to find himself not only the most important person in the household, but the maintainer and the acknowledged head of all, and only half angry that Martha should speak of herself as his dependant: Agnes, thinking solely that now she had gained her point, and should go with him to Allenders; Rose, full of new fears and new hopes, unwilling to realize all that was in her mind; and little Lettie, last of all, chivalrously determined to win, by some unknown means, a fortune and fame for her sisters, far better than Harry's, surrounded this centre figure of the family group. In all minds there was a vague dissatisfaction. This great inheritance, after all, like every thing else which deeply disturbs a life, brought new troubles, no less than new pleasures, in its train.

But Harry made no further resistance to Agnes's desire. An involuntary consciousness that it would be ungracious and unkind to decide contrary to Martha's opinion, after she had acknowledged his authority, had greater effect upon his impulsive mind than the reasonable wish of his wife; for Harry came to do much of what was really right in his conduct by side motives and impulses, and oftener made a start in his direct course by an impetus from some diverging way, than kept steadily on, because he knew that his path was the straight one. But Agnes did not pause to consider the motive. It was enough to her that her point was gained.



CHAPTER XXII.

How does your garden grow ?
With silver bells and cockle shells,
And pretty maids all of a row.

NURSERY RHYMES.

It is a bright May day, and the home-garden at Ayr is as bright as the season. Upon the fresh soft breeze the falling petals of the apple blossoms sweep down, fluttering like snow-flakes to the ground; and the great pear tree trained against the wall is flushed to the extremity of every bough, and has its leaves smothered in its wealth of bloom. By the door here, in the sunshine, is the chair in which Alexander Muir presides over his little flock of workers, and a book held open by his

spectacles, still rests upon it ; but the old man himself is not here. Neither are the girls here, you would say at the first glance ; but look closer into the shady corners, and listen only five minutes—it is all you need to discover your mistake. There are pleasant sounds in the air ; softened young voices, and light-hearted laughter ; and at the foot of Uncle Sandy's chair lies a heap of muslin, ballasted with stones, to keep it safe and preserve it from being blown away ; for Beatie and her sisterhood are idle, extremely idle, and idle even, it must be confessed, is Rose, the viceroy, to whom Uncle Sandy has delegated his charge. They are whispering together, little groups of bright heads, which here and there, the sunshine, stretching over the boughs of the great plane tree, finds out and seizes on, tracing a single curl or braid of hair with delicate gold, and throwing wavy shadows over brow and face. They are dispersed in all the corners of the garden ; but here, leaning against the trunk of the plane tree, flushed with natural gratification, confidential and yet dignified, stands Rose Muir, the centre of the most important group.

Once these girls were little Rosie's playmates ; now, though Rose is not proud, she feels, no less than they do, that there is a difference, and quite acquiesces when they call her Miss Rose, and are respectful as well as friendly. She is standing, with a little of a patroness air, listening while Mary Burness tells of Maggie Crawford's "lad," and Maggie retaliates by a rumour that Mary is to be "cried" in the kirk the very next Sabbath day. Rose laughs a little, blushes a little, and looks so happy and light-hearted, that you perceive at once she could not tell you why—but that there is some unconscious reason of still greater might than the family good fortune which brings back the natural joy so freshly to her heart.

By this open window you hear the sound of voices graver and less youthful. Within, with her hand wandering among the old man's books, sits Martha Muir. Her other hand holds a piece of her accustomed work, but it lies on her knee listlessly ; and with the unconsciousness of preoccupation she turns over and over the books upon the window-shelf—old familiar books, friends which nurtured and strengthened her own youth—but her hand wanders over them as though they were strangers, and she could not tell you what she looks at with those fixed eyes.

"I hope it is all over, uncle," said Martha, slowly ; "I trust

it is—I trust it is. He has had hard lessons, many of them and a great and sudden deliverance. The news of it came to me like an angel from heaven—for I felt that it might save Harry; and so, I hope, I trust it will.”

“You hope, you trust? we all do that, Martha, my woman,” said the old man, anxiously. “I never kent an evil-doing stranger yet that I would not have given all the strength of my good wishes to; but, Martha, God has given you a clearer judgment than many. What *think* ye? what does your ain mind decide as the most likely end?”

“God knows!” said Martha, solemnly. “I *think* nothing, uncle; I only trust and hope. I see no sin in him now—poor Harry! poor Harry! and God send the evil may pass away like the fearful dream, I sometimes believe it is. Do you mind him, uncle—do you mind the pure, grand boy he was? Oh, my Harry! my poor Harry!—but I speak as if I was despairing, when, indeed, I am full of hope,” said Martha, looking up with a faint smile, through the unusual tears which only moistened her dried eyelids, but did not fall.

The old man looked at her doubtfully, with serious and earnest anxiety. She did not lift her eyes, neither did she seem inclined to say more; but her hand went wandering, wandering, over the books she knew so well, opening and closing them with such unconscious fingers, and mind so intently preoccupied, that he shook his head as he turned away, with a prayer, and a pang in his heart. For experience, alas! spoke to him as it spoke to her—sadly, hopelessly; and with Martha he turned from the subject, and would not *think*—would only trust and hope.

“And the other bairns,” said the old man, half questioning her, half consoling himself, “the other bairns; they at least bring us nothing but comfort.”

“Uncle,” said Martha, looking up with quick curiosity, “what brings this Mr. Charteris to Ayr? what is his business here? We meet him wherever we go; what does he want in your house or with us?”

“What is it ye say, Martha?”

Alexander Muir looked up with an awakened face, and glanced out through the framework of leaves and blossoms round the window to where his niece Rose stood under the great plane tree.

“Hush! look at them!” said Martha, grasping her uncle’s arm with her hand, and bending forward eagerly, as if the gesture made her hear as well as see.

There is a stranger in the garden, lingering beside the vacant chair on the threshold, looking wistfully into the shaded corner, with its waving boughs and pursuing sunshine. Just now they are talking rather loud yonder, and laughing with unrestrained glee; and still it is stories of courtship and mirthful wooing which are told to Rose, and still she stands listening, well pleased, with smiles on her face, and in her heart. Rose could not tell you what it is that makes her step so light, her heart so free. It is something which touches duller pleasures into life, and kindles them all with a touch of its passing wing. But it has passed in the night this angel, when she only felt its plumes, and heard its sweet unrecognised voice; and as yet she has not seen the face of this new affection, nor blushes as she lifts her own, frankly to all kindly eyes; yet with the greatest zest she listens to these girlish romances, and smiles, and asks questions—questions which the blushing subject of the story does not always refuse to answer; but just now the narrator has become rather loud, and there is a burst of laughter which good Uncle Sandy would reprove from his window, if he were not more seriously engaged.

Suddenly there falls a complete silence on the little group, broken only after the first moment by an indistinct tittering of confusion and bashfulness, as one by one they steal away, leaving Rose alone under the plane tree—and the stranger advances at a singular pace, which seems to be composed of two eager steps and one slow one, towards her, as she stands, half-reluctant, with her head drooped and the light stealing warmly over her cheek, waiting to receive him.

As he advances the colour rises on his forehead. It may be because he is aware of some close scrutiny, but however that is, Cuthbert Charteris, who can pass with the utmost coolness through every corner of the Parliament House, and make his appearance before the Lords who rule her Majesty's Court of Session without a vestige of shyness, grows very red and lets his glove fall, as he advances to this audience. And the sympathetic Rose blushes too, and hangs down her head, and gives her hand reluctantly, and wishes she were anywhere but here, seeing any other person than Mr. Charteris. Why? For after all, there is nothing formidable about the Edinburgh advocate, and he has been her brother's friend.

Martha's hand again tightened on the old man's arm; then it was slowly withdrawn, and she sat still, looking at them earnestly—looking at them in their fair youth, and with

their fresh hopes round them, like a saint's encircling glory—so great a contrast to herself.

"Well, Martha, well," said the old man, in a lighter tone, "well, my woman—no doubt neither you nor me have anything to do with the like of this; but it is good, like every ordinance of God. If Rosie, poor thing, gets a good man, she'll do well; and we need not be vexed for that, Martha."

"He is a gentleman, uncle, and not a rich one. They'll want him to have a rich wife," said Martha.

"Be content—be content; one fear is over much to foster. We'll have no grief with Rosie," said Uncle Sandy, cheerfully. "If he turns out well, she'll do well, Martha; but if he turns out ill, we must leave her now to God's good care and her ain judgment. And what could we have better for her? But we need not leave them their lane, either. I will go and see after the other bairns myself."

So saying, the old man rose, and Martha lifted her work—but in a few minutes it again dropped on her knee, and opening the window she bent out, and suffered the pleasant air to bathe her forehead, and smooth out the wrinkles which care had engraven on it. "Take care of them, take care of them!" said Martha, under her breath. "God help me! I trust more in my own care than in His."

"Ye're aye idle—aye idle. Do they never come back to you in your dreams the lees ye tell me, and the broken promises?" said Uncle Sandy. "And Beatie, I had your faithful word that all that flower was to be done before the morn."

"Eh, but it was the gentleman," said Beatie, with conscious guilt, labouring at her muslin with great demonstration of industry.

"The gentleman! He came in himsel. He gave you no trouble," said the old man, shaking his head. "And you've been doing naething either, Jessie Laing."

"Eh! *me!* I've weeded a' the strawberry beds, though there's naething on them yet but the blossom," said the accused, in discontent; "and Mary, and Maggie, and the rest of them, telling Miss Rose about their lads a' the time—and naebody blamed but me!"

"Miss Rose has gotten a lad o' her ain—eh! look at the gentleman!" said another of the sisterhood, in an audible whisper.

For Rose had been playing with a sprig of fragrant lilac,

which just now, as she started at sight of her uncle, fell upon the path at her foot; and, with a deferential bend, which every girl who saw it took as a personal reverence to herself, and valued accordingly, Mr. Charteris stooped to pick up the fallen blossom, and by and by quite unobtrusively placed it in his breast.

Uncle Sandy lifted his book, and seated himself, casting a glance of good pleasure towards the plane tree, from which Rose was now approaching the door. Not a girl of all those workers who did not observe intently, and with an interest hardly less than her own "lad" received from her, every look and motion of "the gentleman." Not one of them who would not have intrigued in his behalf with native skill and perseverance, had any of the stock obstacles of romance stood in Cuthbert's way. It was pleasant to see the shy, smiling, blushing interest with which they regarded the stranger and his Lady Rose; something resembling the instinctive, half-pathetic tenderness with which women comfort a bride; but with more glee in it than that.

By and by, when these young labourers were gone, and the shadows were falling over the garden, where little Lettie and Uncle Sandy's maid scattered pleasant sounds and laughter through the dim walks, as they watered Uncle Sandy's dearest flowers, Cuthbert Charteris unwillingly rose from the dim seat by the window, whence he could just see Violet at her self-chosen task, and said irresolutely that he must be gone. The window was open. They had been sitting for some time silent, and the wind, which blew in playfully, making a little riot now and then as it lighted unexpectedly upon the fluttering pages of an open book, was sweet with the breath of many glimmering hawthorns, and of that great old lilac bush—a garden and inheritance in itself—which filled the eastern corner, and hid the neighbouring house with its delicate leaves and blossoms. Opposite to him, Cuthbert still saw the white hair of the old man, and something of Martha's figure withdrawn by his side; but out of a pleasant darkness which his imagination filled very sweetly, had come once or twice the voice of Rose. He could not see her, it had grown so dark, nor could he do more than feel a little soft hand glide into his, when he bade her good-night.

It had a singular charm, this darkness, and Cuthbert grasped the hand firmly and closely before it drew itself away. Then he went out into the soft summer night, with its sweet

dews and sounds. A smile was on his face, his very heart was wrapped in this same soft fragrant gloom, and he went on unconsciously till he reached the river, and stood there, looking down upon the gentle water, flowing graciously, with a sweet ripple, under the pensive stars.

His hand upon his breast touched the lilac blossom. He drew it out to look at it, and held it idly in his fingers, for his first thought was to drop the fading flower into those pure cold waters, and let it float away towards that sea which is the great symbol of all depths. But Cuthbert's second thought, more usual, if not more true, was to restore the drooping blossom, and keep it, though it faded; and then, making an effort to shake off the pleasant mystic darkness which hid him from himself, Cuthbert Charteris roused his dreaming heart, and asked what he did here.

What brought him here? The same question which Martha had put to her uncle. No one saw Cuthbert blush; no one was witness to the conscious smile which rose in spite of himself upon his lip. What brought him here? In fact, the slightest possible piece of business, which at any other time, a letter might have managed; but, in truth—what was it, Cuthbert?

And straightway the thought of Cuthbert Charteris plunged into a long, discursive journey, calculating probabilities, prospects, necessities; but through all wavered this conscious smile, and he felt the warm flush on his face, and looked, as Rose had never looked upon her passing angel, into the very eyes of the fairy guide who had led him thither. The stars were dreaming in the sky, wrapped in soft radiant mist, when he left the river-side. Like them, the young man's heart was charmed. Not fervent enough for passion yet, nor manstrong as it would be—charmed, fascinated, dreaming—a spell of magic over him, was this new power—the earliest spring of a life which should weave itself yet into the very strength of his.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A home to rest, a shelter to defend.

PLEASURES OF HOPE.

THE evening sun shines into the drawing-room of Allenders—the drawing-room newly completed and magnificent, through which Harry Muir's little wife goes merrily, laughing aloud as she pauses to admire again and again those luxurious easy-chairs and sofas, which it is almost impossible to believe are her own. It is a long room occupying the whole breadth of the house, for Harry has taken Cuthbert's hint, and thrown down the partition which once made two dim bed-chambers, where now is this pretty drawing-room.

From the western window you can see the long light stealing over Bannockburn, tracing bright lines of softened green and yellow along the wide strath, and laying down upon the swelling fields as it passes away such a depth of dewy rest and shadow as never lay in any land of dreams. And the hill-tops are dusty and mazed with the rays which stream over them, a flood of golden streaks, falling out of the light like drooping hair; while nearer, at our very feet, as we stand by this window, the burn below flashes out through the heavy alder boughs, in such sweet triumph over its crowning sunbeam, that you unconsciously smile in answer to its smiling, as you would to any other childish joy.

From the other window you can look out upon Demeyet, somewhat sullenly receiving the radiance of the sunset. He, stout rebel, loves better the young morning, whose earliest glance is over his head, before her eyelids are fully opened. How she glances up playfully behind him, how she shrinks under his great shoulder, you will see, when you see the sun rise upon the links of Forth. But Demeyet, like many another, does not know when fortune is kindest to him, nor ever guesses that he himself, with those royal purple tints upon his robed shoulders, and the fitting shades which cover his brow, like the waving plume, shows his great form to better advantage now, than when the faint morning red, and the rising light behind, darkened him with his own shadow. Wherefore Demeyet receives the sunlight sullenly, and glooms upon merry

Agnes Muir at the window of Allenders' drawing-room, till she can almost fancy that he lifts a shadowy arm, and clenches a visionary hand to shake it at her threateningly with defiance and disdain.

A silver tea-service, engraven with the Allenders' crest, and china the most delicate that Agnes ever saw, glitter on the table, which is covered besides with every rare species of "tea-bread" known to the ingenious bakers of Stirling. And now Agnes glides round and round the table, endeavouring to recollect some one thing omitted, but cannot find any excuse for ringing the bell and summoning one of her handmaidens to get another survey of the *tout ensemble*, which dazzles the eyes of the little wife. Harry has gone to Stirling to meet and bring home his sisters; and Uncle Sandy, their escort and guardian, is with them for a visit; and so is poor little Katie Calder, the oppressed attendant of Miss Jean. It is true that Agnes is very affectionate and very grateful—that, herself motherless, she clings to Martha, and would immediately succumb in any strait to the stronger mind, and character, and will of the eldest member of their little household; but withal, Agnes is mortal, and it is impossible to deny that there is quite a new and delightful pleasure to her in feeling herself, and in having others feel, that it is her house to which the sisters are coming—that she is the head of the family, the house-mother, and that all the glories of this grandest of palaces are her own.

Now a faint rumbling of distant carriage-wheels strikes on the excited ear of Agnes, but no carriage is visible from the windows—so she runs impatiently up some flights of narrow winding stairs, and emerges, out of breath, upon the gallery, which conducts to the little turret of Allenders. This gallery is very small—three people standing in it would make quite a little crowd; but then it commands a far-off view of the Forth, beyond Alloa in one direction, and of Stirling's crowned rock, and the Highland hills, and what is still more important at this moment, of the Stirling road, on the other.

And yonder, along the white line of the Stirling road, seen at present only in a glimpse through the trees, comes the pretty open carriage, the price of which Harry is afraid to think of, his latest purchase, with its strong bay horse and its smart groom driver, beside whom Harry himself, still wise enough to acknowledge that he cannot drive, sits leaning back, to point out triumphantly to the crowded company behind

him the first glimpse of their new house. Martha and Uncle Sandy, Rose and the two children, fill the coach almost to over-brimming; and though they are all dusty and hot, there are bright looks on every face of them. But Agnes does not pause to look at their faces, but flies down stairs, nearly tripping herself with the wide folds of her muslin gown, to throw the door hospitably open, and stand herself, dignified like a matron and head of a family, on the threshold to receive the strangers.

At the gate, the innocent Dragon of Allenders twirls his rusty hat feebly on a stick, and laughs to himself with his slow chuckle as he leans upon the open gate; and half in curiosity, half because the house-maid was once in Sir John Dunlop's, and has very proper notions of what is due to the "family," Agnes finds both her servants standing behind her in the hall. The little wife holds her head high, and overflows with dignity and innocent stateliness, all the while feeling an almost irresistible inclination to relieve herself with a burst of incredulous, wondering laughter; for how she ever came to be a great lady, Agnes cannot comprehend.

Now, Lettie, jump! Be first out of the grand carriage—first upon the bright green lawn of Allenders. See, yonder are soft-voiced doves upon the turret; and the spear-head, no longer tarnished, throws gleams about it in the sunshine upon those twinkling, tremulous aspen leaves; and listen here to this child's tongue singing, calling to you though the language is not yours—the burn, Lettie! and this brown foliage is the fragrant walnut; and past the grey walls and that dim library window is a broad gleam of silver, all fretted and broken by twining boughs and foliage, for that is the river—the grand Forth—and this is fairy land!

"Oh, Martha, Martha!—Rose!—Uncle!" cried Agnes, running forward to the carriage door; but as Martha alighted, and took both her hands, the young house-mother forgot her dignity, and instead of the pretty speech she had been meditating, only exclaimed again: "Oh! Martha, Martha!" and burst into a fit of tears.

Laughing, sobbing, smiling, Agnes led them up stairs—and hurried them through all the rooms. A pretty apartment, looking to the river, had been chosen for Martha and Rose, while a smaller one within it was for the children. They were all perfectly and carefully fitted up—alas! for Harry's nine hundred pounds.

"Bairns, I will ask a blessing," said uncle Sandy, as they gathered round the tea-table.

There was an instant hush, and Rose shrouded little Harry's head with her hand, and pressed him closer to her side, to still even the child into reverent silence. She was seated close by the old man, and he, too, raised one hand to shade his reverent forehead, and solemnly lifted the other.

"Lord, a blessing on these offered mercies, a blessing on this roof tree, upon our meeting and our sundering, and upon these Thy bairns, fatherless and motherless, whom Thou hast led hitherto, and brought pitifully unto this day. Give them out of the ark of Thy covenant, comfort them with strength and succour from all evil, for the Lord's sake. Amen."

There was a momentary solemn pause, after the voice ceased—and Rose bent down over the child to hide her face; and Agnes, with the tears still in her eyes, looked wistfully at the old man; and Harry cast down his, and laid his hand softly on Martha's hand. No one said there were fears and hopes—intensest hopes and fears in this new beginning—nor that its brightness trembled with a solemn peradventure: but at this moment all had a consciousness of putting themselves and their fate into the hand of God, and of waiting for what he should bring out of those unknown years. "I cannot tell—God knows what is to come," said Martha's heart, as it yearned within her over them all; and there came to each a strange humility and trust. God knows! one can look calmly into a future which, step by step, is known to our pitiful, great Father. Day by day—hour by hour—they must each of them come to us out of the heavens, full and rounded with the daily tribulation, the daily gladness which is appointed to their lot. But God knows now the way which we shall learn by single footsteps—knows and appoints it for us out of His great love—God knows—it is very well.



CHAPTER XXIV.

Now is the May of life.

ROGERS.

"EH, Violet! there's twa men-servants, and twa maids!" said little Katie Calder.

Katie was short and stout, with a plump, good-humoured

face, and wealth of long fair hair, and a bright-printed frock, bought for her by Uncle Sandy himself, to replace the faded liveries of Miss Jean. Katie had no turn for literature or poetry, like her little kinswoman: but to make up for that, she was stout-hearted and adventurous, redoubtable in winter slides and summer rambles, and with as honest and "aefauld" a child's heart as ever looked through blue eyes. Miss Jean Calder and her penurious oppression had subdued Kate, but they had not crushed her; for Katie was not given to solitary thoughts or plaintive resignation. So instead of standing shyly by, as Violet might have done, and looking on with a longing wish to join the plays of happier children, Katie made bold dashes amongst them, content rather to pay for her play by a good fit of crying, when summoned in to the invariable scold, than to want altogether the wholesome "fun" which was the child's natural breath. So now being prepared by a few days' freedom in Uncle Sandy's house at Ayr, for the liberty and kindness, though scarcely for the grandeur of Allenders, Katie's happy spirit had entirely thrown off the fear and bondage of Miss Jean. She was sitting on a low stool half-dressed, plaiting the long hair which streamed over her plump shoulders, and looking with great admiration at the new chintz frock carefully spread out upon a chair, which she had worn for the first time yesterday.

"Eh, Katie! if you only saw how the sun's rising behind yon muckle hill!" answered Violet from the window.

"And you never saw such a fine kitchen," pursued Katie, "a' the walls glittering with things, and as big as folks could dance in; and such a room with books down the stair. Did you think there was as mony in the world, Lettie?"

"But they're no for reading," said Violet disconsolately, "for I tried them last night; and I would rather have Mr. Sim's library in the Cowcaddens."

"Were there stories in it? Eh Violet, do you think there's ony fairy tales down the stair? for I like them," said Katie Calder; "but if I put on my new frock the day, it'll no be clean on Sabbath to gang to the kirk."

"There's Rose down in the garden—and there's the old man that Harry calls Dragon," cried Violet. "Come, Katie, and see the Forth and our boat."

"It's no so bonnie as our ain water at hame, and there's nae brigs," said Katie, as she donned her new frock, and anxiously examined it, to see whether yesterday's journey had left

any trace upon its bright folds; for Katie was a thrifty little woman, and knew that she had no other dress worthy of Allenders.

It was still very early. Rose had newly left the house, and now stood alone under the great shadow of the walnut tree, looking up at the windows, beyond which the greater part of the household were still asleep. She had left Martha in a deep, quiet, dreamless slumber, which did not begin till the sky was reddening over Demeyet; and Rose, who had just been congratulating herself on having a free unoccupied hour to think, stood now endeavouring, with some confusion, to recollect what it was she wanted to think about. Her mind was in a tumult of sweet morning fancies, and the something on which she resolved to meditate, eluded her, with many a trick and wile, like a playful child. A slight wavering blush came over her face, as now and then she seemed to catch a glimpse of it for a moment; but immediately it was lost again among the thick-coming fancies of her stirred and wakening mind; yet strangely enough, Rose did not pass the library window, nor seek the mall by the water-side. Not very long ago, nothing could have interested her more than the river and the hills beyond; now she only threw herself down on the lawn beneath the walnut tree, and leaning her head on her hand, played with the grass on which her eyes were bent, and mused and pondered with a downcast face. Sometimes indeed, her eyes were closed, and even when she opened them the dreamer saw nothing of Allenders. No; for she was secretly making pictures which could not bear the eye of day, much less the inspection of brother or sister; remembering, with such strange tenacity of recollection, what was done and what was said, on yonder May evening in the garden at Ayr, and in the gloom of the little parlour, and unconsciously creating other scenes like that, in which the same chief actor bore the hero's part.

Rose! Rose! you would blush and start like guilt, did any home voice at this moment call your name; but the spell of this dreaming clings to you like slumber, and you can no more shake it off, than you could the sweet deep sleep which last night surprised you against your will, and changed those waking musings into the fantastic visions of the night; and your eyes grow heavy, Rose, while your heart wanders in this maze, and a soft uncertainty steals over your fair pictures, though with a sudden start, half of displeasure, you hear the

steps of the children hastening to join you, and give up your maiden meditations with a sigh.

Behind the walnut tree, the poor old Dragon feebly bends over the flower beds, plucking up here and there, with an effort, a solitary weed, but oftenest looking idly towards Rose, whom he would fain go and speak to, were not her preoccupation so evident. The great walnut waves its large fragrant leaves in the soft morning-air between them, and the sun burns in the gilded spear on the turret, and the broad light clothes the whole country like a garment. Strongly contrasted in this framework of summer life about them, are the two human creatures who complete the picture. The girl lingering on the threshold of a fair life unknown to her, and peopling all its fairy world with scenes which thrill her to a half-conscious joy; the old man in the torpor of great age, vacantly admiring her fresh youth, and with a strange, dim curiosity about her, who she is, and what she would say if he addressed her. To him a long life has passed like a dream, and appears in a mist to his memory, as in a mist it appears to her imagination; but the time is long past when anything could find out the old faint beating heart of Adam Comrie, to thrill it with emotion. His curiosities, his likings, his thoughts, have all become vague as a child's; but they lie on the surface, and never move him, as a child's fancies do.

"See how the old man looks at Rose," whispered Katie Calder; "but she doesna see him yet; and Violet, look at her. She's bonnie."

"But what way is she sitting there?" said Violet, wonderingly, "when she might be at the water-side. She's thinking about Harry; but what needs folk think about Harry now? Harry is in his bed and sleeping, Rose; but, oh! I see—you were not thinking about him after all."

Rose started with a vivid blush. No, indeed, she had not been thinking of Harry; it sounded like an accusation.

"And you'll be yon birkie's Lady Rose?" said the Dragon, coming forward. "Aweel, I wadna say but he thought ye bonnier than my white bush; but they didna howk up the rose either; that's ae comfort—though nae thanks to him, nor to this lad, Mr. Hairy, that took his counsel. What do they ca' this little bairn?"

"My name's Violet," said Lettie, with dignity.

"There was a Miss Violet in the last family; but she would have made six o' that bit creature," said the old servant. "What way are ye a' sae wee?"

"Eh! Lettie's a head higher than me!" exclaimed Katie Calder in amazement.

"Are you gaun to be married upon yon birkie now, if ane might speer?" asked the feeble Dragon. "I've lived about this house sixty year, but there hasna been a wedding a' that time; and now how I'm to do wi' young wives and weans I canna tell. The last Allenders had a wife ance, folk say, but I never mind of her. He was ninety year auld when he died, and lived a widow three score years and five. I'm eighty mysel, and I never was married. It's aye best to get ower the like o' that when folk's young; but you're just a lassie yet; you should wait awhile, and be sicker; and yon birkie has nae reverence for the constitution. I'm an awfu' guid hand for judging a man, and I ken as muckle by what he said about the windows."

"Eh, Rose, is't Mr. Charteris that's the birkie?" cried Violet, with extreme interest.

But Rose had risen from the grass, and now leaned upon the walnut tree, vainly trying to look serious and indifferent. This face which had been eluding her dreams so long, looked in gravely now upon her heart; and Rose trembled and blushed, and could not speak, but had a strong inclination to run away somewhere under cover of the leaves, and weep a few tears out of her dazzled eyes, and soothe her heart into calmer beating. The old man chuckled once more in childish exultation.

"I'll no tell—ye may trust me—and if ye'll come in ower, I'll let you see the white rose-bush that garred yon birkie name ye to me. Whaur are ye for, you little anes? is't the boat the bairns want? I'm saying!—I'll no hae ony o' you drowning yoursels in the water: and I gie you fair warning, if you should fa' in twenty times in a day, I'm no gaun to risk life and limb getting ye out again—it doesna stand to reason that a wean's life should be as valuable to this witless world as the life of an aged man. And I've had muckle experience in my day—muckle experience, Miss Rose; and aye glad to communicate, as the Apostle bids, and ready to give counsel, wi' nae mair pride than if I had seen but ae score o' years instead of four. It's a great age."

"And do they call you Dragon?" asked Violet, shyly.

"That's what they ca' me; for I've lang keepit Allenders, and been a carefu' man of a' in it, from the master himsel to the berry bushes; but my right name is Edom Comrie, if

onybody likes to be so civil as ca' me that. I'm saying, wee Missie, do ye think I could carry ye? but I'm no so strong as I was forty year ago."

"You could carry little Harry; but I can rin, and so can Katie Calder," said Violet.

"Wha's Katie Calder?"

"It's me," answered the little stranger; "and I'm Lettie Muir's third cousin; and I'm to stay at Allenders, and no to go back to Miss Jean any more."

"Weel, ye maun baith be guid bairns. I like guid bairns mysel," said the old man; "and ye can just come to me when ye want a piece scone or a whcen berries, and there's nae fears o' ye; and I'll aye gie them an advice, Miss Rose, and mind them of their duty. Ye needna be feared but I'll do grand with the bairns."

"Do you live in the house?" asked Rose, a little timidly, for she was somewhat alarmed at the second sight of the poor old Dragon.

"That minds me ye havena seen my room," said Dragon, briskly. "Come your ways round—aye, I just live in Allenders—and gie me a haud o' your hands, bairns, and Miss Rose will come after us, and ye'll get a sight of my house."

So the soft warm childish hands, glided into the withered fingers of the old man, and Rose followed, passing by the luxuriant white rose-bush, now blooming in the full flush of its snowy flowers under the new window of the dining-room, into a little court-yard behind where was the stable and byre, and where Mysie, the Dragon's grand-niece, was just then milking the cow. This great temptation, Violet and Katie withstood womanfully, and passing the milk-pail and the active hands which filled it, with an effort, looked round somewhat impatiently for the Dragon's den.

"Ye maun come up here," said the old man, "ane at a time—ane at a time—and if ye're light-headed, take a grip o' the wa', for folk are whiles dizzy on an outside stair; and now here you see I have like a wee house all to mysel."

The "outside stair" was very narrow and much worn; it was evident it had undergone no repair in all Harry's labours, and Rose was fain to grasp herself at a withered branch of ivy which still clung to the wall, though life and sap had long departed from it, to secure her own safe passage upwards, and to stretch out her arm on the other side in terror for the children. Adam Comrie's room was only the loft over the

stable, a square low place, with bare rafters and a sky-light in the roof; but Adam's bed was in one corner, and on a little table, immediately under the window, stood a bowl, ready for Adam's porridge, and the little round pot in which he made it, was beside his little fire.

"For ye see when it behooved me to live a'thegether at Allenders, the auld maister caused build me a bit grate into the wall. I was a young lad then, and might have taken my meat in the kirchen with Eppie, but I aye was of an independent kind, and I had mair faith in my ain parritch and kail than in onybody else's; so I came to be a constant resider here; and there's the Lady's Well no a dizzen yards from the stair fit, and the kitchen very near hand. Do ye like stories? Weel, I'll tell ye some day the story o' the Lady's Well."

"Eh, Dragon, is't a fairy tale?" asked Katie Calder, with wide-open eyes.

"Naebody can tell that; but I have plenty of fairy tales," said the old man. "Ye see, it was in the auld times, maybe twa hundred year ago, or mair siller, that the Laird of Allenders had a young daughter, and her name was—aye, Miss Rose, that's my meal ark—it doesna haud muckle aboon a peck at a time; and here's where I keep my bannocks, and I have a wee kettle and a pickle tea and sugar there; and for the greens I have just to gang down to the garden and cut them, nae leave asked, and my drap milk brought regular to the very door. Ye see I'm weel off, and I'm ready to own it and be thankful, instead of graneing forever like some folk—for I'm real comfortable here."

"And have you no friends?" asked Rose.

"Weel, there's Mysie down there, milking the cow, and there's her father, my sister's son. Eh, to see the ill the world and a family do to a man! for there's that lad Geordie Paxton, no fifty year auld, and he's a mair aged man than me—'for such shall have sorrow in the flesh,' the Apostle says; and never being married mysel, ye see, and keeping up nae troke wi' far-off kin, that's a' the friends, except a cousin, here and there, that I hae."

"And does naebody ever come to see you?" asked Katie.

"No a creature—wha should mind me, a silly auld man?" answered the Dragon, with a momentary pathos in his tone. "And I couldna be fashed wi' strangers either, and you see I hae a'thing within mysel, milk and meal, board and bed, sae that I'm nae ways dependent on either fremd-folk or friends;

but ye may speak for me if you like, Miss Rose, to Mr. Hairy for a book whiles. There's grand, solid books yonder of the auld maister's, and there's ane or twa that I found out no lang syne that wadna do for the like of you—I wouldna consent to lead away the young wi' them; but they do weel enough to divert an auld man that has experience of the world, and kens guid from evil; and I'll promise faithful to burn every word o' them when I've ta'en the divert mysel. Here's ane, ye see. I wadna let you read it, and you a young lassie; but ye may look at its name."

And looking, Rose discovered in the charred bundle of leaves which lay on the old man's hob, and lighted his fire, a torn "Vicar of Wakefield."

"Eh, I've read that!" said Violet, under her breath; and Violet looked on with horror as if at a human sacrifice.

"Every morning, when I take a page for my light, I read it first," said the Dragon, chuckling; "there's that muckle diversion in't; but it's no for you—it's no for the like of you."

CHAPTER XXV.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.
HAMLET.

"HARRY, my man, you must be canny with the siller," said Uncle Sandy. "It's a snare to the feet of many—and mind, this fortune brings such a change in your case, that there is a danger of you thinking it greater than it is."

"No fear, uncle," said Harry, pausing in his new land-proprietor mood to cut down a thistle with a swinging blow of his cane. "No fear, I say. I'll live up to my income, but then that is perfectly legitimate, for the estate does not die with me. Just now, of course, there are a number of expenses which never will be renewed in my time—all this improvement and furnishing—and that may straighten me for a year, perhaps—but then I expected that; and I don't want to hoard and lay up money, uncle."

"Nor would I want that, Harry," said the old man; "far from it—but mind—"

‘No for to hide it in a hedge,
Nor for a train attendant,
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent.’

I am not a man to blaw about independence, Harry ; and even Robert Burns himself, poor man, speaks of his ain in a way that pleases me little—but it’s a grand thing to feel that you’re standing on your ain feet, and no leaning on a prop that may be drawn away itself and ruin you. I am not the right person to give you counsel either, Harry, for I ken little about the affairs of the world, how they work, or what’s the wisest way—only I’m an auld man, and have had my ain thoughts; be canny, Harry, with the siller.”

“ Yes, yes, no fear,” repeated Harry, a little impatiently; “ there is one thing I thought of speaking to you about, uncle. They tell me that if I took William Hunter’s farm into my own hands, and cultivated it in the scientific way—I could employ a man to manage that, you know—I might double its value. Now in the estate of Allenders, there’s this Mr. Hunter’s farm, which he pays two hundred pounds for, and a Mr. Sinclair has a much less one for a hundred and fifty, and there’s a house I’ll show you between this and Stirling, with twenty acres attached to it, that pays me fifty pounds—and the rest of the property is made up of some houses in Stirling, and the half of the village down here. So you see there is part of my income dependent on the chance of these houses letting well. They are all right just now, but one can never depend on that, and Mr. Hunter’s lease is out. He does not wish to renew it himself, and though I have several offers for the farm, I have a great mind to keep it in my own hands. I think such an occupation as that is the very thing for me ; but then, I’ve no capital.”

“ Ay Harry, ay Harry,” said his uncle with eager interest, “ are you thinking already about occupation for the leisure that God has given you ? I like that—it gives me good heart ; and, Harry, my man, just look at that grand country. I ken no pleasure greater than working on it, and bringing out the wealth that is home-born and in the soil, better than your merchandising, Harry,” and the old man heartily shook his nephew’s hand.

“ Yes, uncle ; but the capital,” said Harry.

“ I thought there was something to the fore—something in the bank to begin you with ? ay, yes—I did not mind, you

have spent that in the house ; but, Harry, I have nothing myself, but two hundred pounds, and I wanted, if it were God's will, to leave some bit present to the bairns when I was gone ; besides two hundred pounds could do little for you, Harry."

"Nothing at all," said Harry quickly ; "but I have a plan you might help me in. How much money will Miss Jean have, uncle ?"

"Jean Calder ?—na, na, Harry," said the old man, shaking his head. "I would not with my will, speak ill or judge unkindly of any mortal, but charity—I am meaning the free heart and kind thought—is not in her. Did you no hear the fight we had to get your papers from her ? No, Harry ; I'm sorry to damp you. She may have a thousand pounds, maybe. As much as that I warrant ; but you'll make nothing of Miss Jean."

"A thousand pounds ! My plan, uncle, is to offer her better interest than she could get elsewhere," said Harry. "As for her kindness, I should never think of that ; and I would not ask it, because I was her brother's grandson, but because I could offer her so much per cent. ; that's the way. Now a thousand pounds from Miss Jean would make these lands bear other crops than this—look, uncle."

They were standing at the corner of a field of thin and scanty corn. The long ears bent upon the breeze, like so many tall attenuated striplings ; and their chill green contrasted unpleasantly with the rich brown tint which began to ripen over a full, rustling, wholesome field on the other side of the way.

"It's a poor crop," said Uncle Sandy, meditatingly ; "it's like the well doings of a cauld heart—it wants the good-will to grow. But Jean Calder, Harry—Jean Calder help any man ! Well, Providence may soften her heart ; but it is not in her nature."

"She will give the money for her own profit," said Harry ; "no fear. I will consult Mr. Lindsay, and we can offer her good interest. Then you see, uncle, the advantage of it is, that we are her rightful heirs, and she is a very old woman now."

"Whisht, Harry ; let me never hear the like of this again," said his uncle, gravely ; "you are a young man now, but God may keep you to be an old one. Never you reckon on the ending of a life, that it is in God's hand to spare or take away,

and never grudge the air of this living world—such as it is, we aye desire to breathe it lang ourselves—to one that He keeps in it day by day, nourishing the auld worn-out heart with breath and motion, for good ends of His ain. And, Harry, this money is the woman's life—I could not think of the chance of its perishing without pain and trouble, for it would be a dreadful loss to her—like the loss of a bairn.”

“Well, well, uncle, no chance of its being lost,” said Harry, somewhat fretfully; “but will you speak to her when you go back to Ayr? will you undertake to negociate this for me? I know she trusts you.”

“She trusts me just as other folk do, who have kent me tell few lies all my lifetime,” said Uncle Sandy, “but as for more than this, Harry, Jean Calder trusts no man. Well, I'll tell her—I would not choose the office, but since you ask me, I'll tell her, Harry, and put it before her in the best way I can. That you should have occupation, is a good thought; and it's well too to increase your substance—well, my man, well; but you'll need to be eident, and keep an eye yourself on every thing—and even, Harry, you'll need to learn.”

“Oh, yes, I'll learn,” said Harry, “but the money, uncle, is the important thing—there will be little difficulty with the rest.”

The old man shook his head.

“Have more regard to the difficulties, Harry—if you do so, you'll overcome them better; for mind ye, siller is sometimes maister, but he's easier to subdue and put your foot upon, than such things as heart, and mind, and conscience. Harry, be canny; God sometimes appoints us a hard school when we are slow of the uptake in an easy one. But you need not gloom—auld men get license of advising, and ye mind how the cottar ‘mixes a’ with admonition due.’”

“Yes,” said Harry, laughing, “I am fated to have counsellors—for yonder is our old Dragon who has no objection to give me the benefit of his experience too.”

Alexander Muir slightly erected his white head with a single throb of injured feeling; for with all his natural and gracious humility, he did not choose to come down to the level of the poor old Dragon of Allenders; but when a considerable silence followed, and Harry walking by his side with a sullen gloom contracting the lines of his face, made violent dashes now and then at groups of frightened poppies, or at the lordly resistant thistle, the old man was the first to speak—for his

anxious friends could not venture to offend this indulged and wayward Harry.

“The rough bur thistle spreading wide
Among the bearded bear—”

said the old man, quietly; “aye, Harry, my man, there were fine thoughts in that grand castaway; and a sore thing it is to see how little great gifts avail, and what shipwrecks folk may make with them—if this were any thing but the avenue and porch of the great lifetime, which we forget so easy! I’ve been of little use myself, Harry, in my day and generation—little use but to comfort the hearts of bairns, and give them now and then an hour’s sunshine and pleasance—but you’re better gifted both in mind and estate than I ever was. I make ye my depute, Harry, to do better service to God and man than me.”

Oh, gentle, righteous heart! a sudden impulse of humility and tenderness came upon Harry Muir’s impressible spirit. Better service! yet this old man seemed to have lived for no other conscious end, than the service of God and man.

CHAPTER XXVI.

You follow the young prince up and down like his evil angel.
KING HENRY IV.

“EH, Harry, here’s a gentleman coming,” said Violet, as she sat on the floor at the western window of the drawing-room with a book on her lap. Katie Calder kneeling beside her, was looking from the window, and making a superb cat’s cradle on her fingers. It was evening, and lessons and work alike concluded, the children chose each her own manner of amusement, until tea should be over, and leave them free for their out-door ramble. But it was Katie’s observation which discovered the gentleman, though Violet was by no means inquisitive, when the discovery was communicated to her.

“Oh!” said Harry, turning from the window with a slight flush on his face, “it’s Gibbie Allenders—I might as well see him alone—but that would hurt his feelings. Mind he’s quite a foolish fellow.”

This speech was addressed to no one in particular, but Harry looked annoyed and restless, and they all perceived it. Gilbert Allenders, indeed, was a kind of ghost to Harry ; for already an intimacy which disgusted his finer mind, but which he seemed to have no power to struggle against, had sprung up between them, and Gilbert never failed by jibe or malicious allusion, every time they met, to remind his new kinsman under what circumstances they first saw each other. Poor Harry ! his earliest error here haunted him perpetually—he could not shake its consequences off.

“Has he got his smoking-room fitted up yet, Mrs. Muir Allenders,” asked Gilbert, after the ceremonies of his introduction—though he had seen Agnes before—were over. “Has Harry not begun to retreat into a den of his own yet? Ah, you don’t know how we young fellows do in these respects—and really Allenders has shown so much good taste in the other parts of the house, that I am quite anxious to see the den—I’ve seen a collection of pipes in a German student’s room, that would astonish all Scotland to match—Bursch as they call themselves—horrid language that German—but I never could manage the coarse gutturals.”

“We have plenty in our own tongue,” said Uncle Sandy, quietly.

“Ah, Scotch—gone out of date, Sir, out of date—civilized people forget that there ever was such a jargon. I say, Harry, wasn’t that fine, that song Simson gave us the first night I saw you—magnificent—I didn’t know Allenders then, Miss Muir, quite a chance meeting, was it not extraordinary? and I think the first night he was in Stirling too—wasn’t it, Harry?”

Harry cast a guilty angry look round the room ; Martha started in her chair, Agnes glanced up uneasily ; and Uncle Sandy involuntarily shook his head ; but Rose, happy Rose, heard nothing of it all, for with her eyelids drooping in a pleasant heaviness, she was dreaming out her dream—and though it was herself whom Gilbert addressed as Miss Muir, Rose remained peacefully ignorant of all he said.

“And there’s your friend, that lawyer fellow—your business man, I suppose, Allenders—he wasn’t with you ; a couple of slow chaps, that advocate and him,” continued the sapient Mr. Gilbert. “I wouldn’t give two-pence for such society. If they’re not as flat as the canal and as slow as a heavy boat, I’m no judge.”

"It happens that we are all indebted to Mr. Charteris, and that he is a friend of ours," said Martha quickly, "I believe Harry is proud to call him so."

"And I am sure I never met a pleasanter man," stole in Agnes.

And the eyes of Rose gleamed positive lightning upon the redoubtable Gilbert. But Rose, though she ventured upon a little short prefatory cough, said nothing.

"By-the-bye," said Harry hurriedly, "you have not seen the grounds, Allenders; come and give me your opinion of them."

"Delighted if the ladies will accompany us," said Mr. Gilbert; "otherwise, Harry, I am much obliged, but can't be detached from such fair company." And Gilbert returned with a glance of very unequivocal admiration, the indignant flash of Rose's eye.

A pause of general disconcertment followed; irritated and defiant, Harry tossed about the books upon a little table near him, and moodily evaded the looks which sought his face. Mr. Gilbert Allenders, the only person present at ease, pulled up his high collar, and settled his long chin comfortably upon his stock, while Agnes, in a little flutter of anxious deprecation and peace-making, began to move among her cups and saucers, and to prepare tea.

"We have never had the pleasure of seeing you in Stirling yet, Miss Muir," said Gilbert, turning his back upon Martha, and addressing himself with great demonstration to Rose. "Haven't you had my sisters out, calling? I thought so. They're nice girls enough, considering they've been always in the country. Ah, there's nothing like a season or two in London for polishing up a man."

"Have you been in London, Mr. Allenders?" asked Agnes.

"Yes, three or four years; but I'm not quite a good specimen," said Mr. Gilbert, modestly, "for I was at work all the time, studying very hard—oh! very hard;" and the painful student laughed loudly at his own boast of industry. "I say, Harry, Leith races come on next month—you'll go with us, won't you? there's Simson and Allan and me; I said you would be sure to come."

"I don't care a straw for Leith races," said Harry, rudely; but notwithstanding he raised his head, and looked by no means so indifferent as he spoke.

"Care! who said anybody cared?" answered Gilbert: "One must go to lots of places one doesn't care a straw for—it becomes a duty to society. I'll undertake to say you'll come, Harry. We needn't be more than a couple of days away, and the ladies won't miss you. Permit me, Miss Muir."

And Gilbert, politely shutting out Martha and her uncle from sight of the tea-table with his long loose person and his easy chair, elaborately waited upon Rose, and devoted himself to her in a laborious attempt at conversation; but it is very hard to make a conversation where one of the interlocutors says only "Yes" and "No," and those with anything but good will; so Gilbert took in Agnes as a partaker of his attentions, and talked so fine, and intimated so many festivities to come when the summer should be over, that the little wife grew interested in spite of herself, and wondered (for Agnes had been very "strictly" brought up) whether it would be proper and decorous for her, a matron and house-mother, twenty years old, to go to a ball. Martha, behind backs, sat quietly at her work, and said nothing; while Uncle Sandy looked on with a slight expression of displeasure and offence. The old man had a sensitive perception of ill manners, and by no means liked them to be applied to himself. But Martha was not offended by the neglect of Gilbert Allenders.

After tea, Harry—who had remained very moody and abstracted, except for a few minutes when he, too, kindled at those descriptions of local party-giving—proposed a walk in the grounds, where Agnes willingly, and Rose with great reluctance, were persuaded to accompany them. Rose was very innocent of flirtation—circumstances had guarded her, and kept from her both temptation and opportunity—so that, fully freighted with her present dreams, there could have been nothing less pleasant to Rose than to walk slowly along the mall, under the over-arching foliage, leaning upon the arm of Mr. Gilbert Allenders. And Mr. Gilbert Allenders was burdened with no delicacy. He kept steadily behind Harry and Agnes, he lingered in quiet places, he spoke tender sentimentalities, he *quizzed* the young ladies of Stirling, he insinuated his perfect conviction of the extreme superiority of Miss Rose Muir; but no amount of proof could have persuaded Gilbert of a tenth part of the disgust and dislike with which Rose Muir listened. She was very near telling him so several times, and begging rather to hear the rude jokes than the

mawkish sentiment. But Rose was shy, and her safest refuge was in silence.

"What has Harry to do with such a man as that?" said Uncle Sandy. "Martha, I doubt this fortune is to have its dangers, as great as the poverty."

"Ay, uncle." Martha had seen enough, after a week at Allenders, to convince her of that.

"And he's taken with Rose," said the old man. "You were feared for Mr. Charteris, Martha; but there's more reason here."

"No reason, uncle, no reason," was the quiet answer. "He may harm Harry, but Rose is very safe."

"So she is, it is true," said the uncle. "Ay, and the man that would do no harm to Harry might harm the free heart that clings by nature to things that are true and of good report. God preserve these bairns! If such a thing were happening as that Rose was to marry, I think, Martha, my woman, you should come cannily hame to me."

A long time after, when both of them had relapsed into thoughtful silence, Martha answered:

"May be, uncle—it might be best; but many things must come and go between this time and that."

"Harry has been speaking to me about a project he has," said the old man, "about farming and borrowing siller. Has he told you, Martha?"

"Ay, uncle."

"And you think well of it?"

"An occupation is always good," said Martha. "I am doubtful and anxious about his plans for getting money, but the work should do him service; and Harry has begun on a great scale here, uncle. It is impossible he can go on so on his present income, and he will rather increase than diminish—he is always so confident. So I should be glad to think he had a chance of improving the property. I thought it a great fortune a month ago. It does not look so inexhaustible now."

"Well, as the money would come to you at any rate in the ordinary course of nature," said the old man, hesitating; "and as there is aye the land to fall back upon, no to speak of my two hundred pounds, I think I may venture to speak to Miss Jean whenever I get back to Ayr."

"Miss Jean! Does Harry mean to ask her for the money?" asked Martha.

"What think ye of it? She is far from a likely person, but he means to offer her higher interest, he says, than anybody else. What think ye of it, Martha? for I am only doubtful myself," said the old man, anxiously.

But Murtha only shook her head. "Do it, if Harry asks you, uncle—do it. I have given up advising now. He must be left alone."

And Harry, to his great wonder, and with a strange mixture of irritation and pleasure, found himself left alone—suffered, without remonstrance or check, to follow entirely the counsel of his own will. Good little Agnes had great trust in what Harry *said* about economy and prudence, and triumphantly pointed out to Martha those resolutions of sublime virtue with which every piece of practical extravagance was prefaced; and Martha listened with a grave smile, and never suggested doubt to the simple heart, which, for itself, saw the most inexhaustible fortune in those much spoken of "rents," and never dreaded now the old familiar evils of poverty.

Martha descended from her mother's place among them. She stood aside, as she felt was meet, and suffered the young husband and the young wife to take their lawful place, free of all interference of hers. She herself now was only guardian to Rose and Violet, domestic helper of Mrs. Agnes—Harry Muir's quiet elder sister, living in his house, a member of his family; and Martha's natural pride took a secret unconscious delight in bowing itself to this voluntary humility. She soon began to be neglected, too, for the strangers who visited the young household did not feel that the eldest and least attractive member of it had any such claim on their attention as the pretty, girlish wife, or the graceful sister Rose. So Martha dwelt more and more in her own room, always working, and watching the shadows on Demeyet for her hourly relaxation. These shadows going and coming, and the soft wind rustling in the leaves, and the water continually passing by, and gleaming out and in among the shadowing foliage, were delights to her in her solitude. So were the children, when they drew her out to walk between them by the waterside, or when they sat at her feet, and retailed to her the stories of Dragon; and so were Harry's good spirits, his constant occupation, his very infrequent lapses, and the sunny tone and atmosphere with which the hopeful house was filled. Yet Martha was anxious for Rose, whose dreams—sweet golden mists—were the first and only thoughts which her young sister had never ventured to whis-

per in her ear ; for the graver woman knew by true instinct, though they had never visited her own experience, what these youthful dreamings were, and always gave tenderly and quietly the sympathy which the young moved heart came to seek of her, when Rose leaned upon her shoulder in the summer nights, and looked at the star twinkling about Demeyet, and sighed. With her arm round the girl's waist, and both their faces veiled in the gloom, Martha would sigh, too, and tell stories of the old time that was past—gentle remembrances of the father and mother, tales of Uncle Sandy, and of many a familiar name in Ayr. And Rose smiled, and shed gentle tears, and asked questions about those old humble romances, those dead sorrows, those softened and tranquil histories of common life, till the dreams in her heart no longer oppressed her with their shadowy enchantment, but floated away, leaving her only with a deeper apprehension and sympathy ; and themselves came back, when it was their time, freshened as with the evening dews. Sometimes, while they were thus seated by the open window, Martha leaning on it, and Rose on her, with sweet sounds ascending—rustling of trees and water, far-off child-voices of Violet and Katie, Martha would feel for a moment—and as she felt it, her steady hand shook a little, and her voice trembled—that this ready memory of hers, and the unconscious link which drew one story after another into her remembrance, and from her lips, was a mark of the age which began gradually to draw near. Age ! the time of repose, of quietness, of peace ; in the day-time, when such a thought struck her, the fiery heart within her chafed and rebelled ; but at night she only felt her eyelid moisten, and her heart swell. Martha was wrong—age was not near ; but in spite of forebodings and anxiety, this was a time of peace—a reposing time wherein strength for the great conflict was to be gathered.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Three thousand ducats for three months, and
Antonio bound.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

"THE land is aye guid security," said Alexander Muir doubtfully to himself, as he slowly brushed his Sabbath-day's hat, and glanced from the window to where one or two of his younger visitors, carrying their work idly in their hands, strayed with wistful looks past his strawberry beds. "There are hungry e'en among these bairns, and what can we expect, poor things? I must promise them a lawful feast in the afternoon, if they'll no pick any berries the time I'm away; and there's my two hundred pounds if it should come to the worst—but two hundred's a far way off a thousand; and the house and the garden are worth but little siller, and to sell them would break my heart. Well, I can aye see what Miss Jean says; and if all belonging to ye have done hard things for ye, in their day, Harry, my man, this is no the least."

"Bairns," continued the old man from the window, "do ye see yon strawberries yonder among the leaves? I'll be out an hour—you might have time to make an end of them if ye liked—but I ken there is far mair honour among ye than the like of that. Maggie, my dear, never you mind the rasps—they can stand steady of themsels, and need no prop. Beatie, come away from the strawberries like a good bairn."

"It's just a branch that's lying ower the border—somebody's sure to tramp on't," exclaimed Beatie.

"Never you mind, my woman, so it's not you that does it," answered the old man. "Enter not into temptation—turn your backs upon them like good bairns; and if I see there's good work done when I come back, ye shall have a table spread out, and I'll tell Mrs. Tamson to send in some cream, and ye shall gather the berries for yoursels."

One or two smiling faces looked up and nodded thanks, and there was a very general quickening of needles; but Mary Burness, who had "cast out" with her "lad" the night before, drooped her head pathetically and sighed. Poor Mary, in her melancholy, had a soul above strawberries!

Having delivered this his last message, and given to Jessie, his little handmaiden, special directions to prepare for this simple entertainment, Alexander Muir took his staff in his hand, and set out solemnly to call upon Miss Jean.

He had left Allenders only the previous day, and had left it in good spirits, giving Harry particular charge about the "schooling" of Violet and Katie, which the old man perceived ran some risk of being neglected, at least by the heads of the house. But Uncle Sandy had great hopes of Harry, and was much interested about the occupation which Harry desired for his leisure. Nevertheless, the old man walked slowly towards the dwelling-place of Jean Calder. He needed to be a brave man who should venture to ask money from her.

"Ou, ay, she's aye steering," said, discontentedly, the woman who occupied the lower story of Miss Jean's house, "weary tak her! I have had nae peace o' my life since ye took that little brat Katie away. She fees my wee lassie wi' ten shillings in the year to kindle her fire, and do a' her needs, and expects me forbye to wash her claes into the bargain, as if I hadna plenty to do wi' a man, and a muckle laddie, and a' thae weans! I wadna have let Aggie gang, but just I thought five shillings—though it didna come till the end o' the half year—couldna weel come amiss where there's aye sae muckle to do wi't, and Aggie was just to gang up in the morning. Instead of that it's Aggie here, Aggie there, the hail day through; and she never as muckle as says, have ye a mouth,—except for that drap parritch in the morning, and sour milk."

"Poor woman! *she* gets more ill than you," said the old man, compassionately; "but Aggie has mother and father to look after her, and see she's no ill used; whereas little Katie had but a widow woman to look to, who couldna have another mouth brought hame to her; and that makes a great difference; so now I'll go up the stair and see Miss Jean."

But the old man's heart almost failed him, as he paused at the half-opened door. He had no opportunity of escape, however, for the sharp, anxious, miser-ear had heard the approaching footstep; and the shrill, quivering voice of Miss Jean Calder demanded impatiently, "Wha's there?"

"It's me," said Alexander Muir, meekly. "If ye're well enough, and your lane, I'll come in, Miss Jean."

"Aye, come in, and gie us the news," answered Miss Jean, appearing at the kitchen-door in a thick muslin cap, with great flaunting borders, borrowed from Aggie's indignant mother.

The poor lean cheeks looked thinner and more gaunt than usual within the wide full muslin wings which flaunted out from them on either side; and hot as this July day was, Miss Jean had been sitting, with an old faded woollen shawl over her shoulders, close by the fire. "Ye may come in, Sandy, since it's you, and gie us the news—just inbye here. It's nae guid standing on ceremony wi' auld friends like you. Come inbye to the fire, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, graciously.

The old man entered the little kitchen with some trepidation, though he hailed this singular courtesy as a good omen, and was emboldened for his difficult errand.

The kitchen was small, and hot, and stifling, for the July sun, very imperfectly kept out by a torn curtain of checked linen and a broken shutter, accomplished what Miss Jean's penurious handful of fire scarcely could have done. A small round deal table stood before the fire-place; opposite to it was the door of Miss Jean's "concealed bed," which she closed in passing; while between the fire-place and the window a wooden "bunker," dirty and wounded, filled up all the wall. Miss Jean herself sat by the fire-side in a high wooden elbow-chair, furnished with one or two loose thin cushions, which scarcely interposed the least degree of softness between the sharp corners of the chair, and the sharper corners of her poor worn, angular frame. A little black teapot stood by the fire—for thrift Miss Jean never emptied this teapot; it always stood baking there, and always had its scanty spoonful of new tea added to the accumulation of half-boiled leaves, till it would bear no further addition, and compelled a reluctant cleaning out.

But on the top of Miss Jean's bunker, a strange contrast to the penurious meanness of all her other arrangements, lay a great ham, enveloped in greasy paper, and roasting slowly in an atmosphere to which it was very little accustomed. A certain look of recognition given by Uncle Sandy to this very respectable edible, and an evident importance with which he stood endowed in the eyes of Miss Jean, explained how it came here—a peace-offering from Allenders to the wealthy miser.

"It was weel dune of ye, Sandy, to gar them mind the auld wife—very weel dune; and ane canna say what may come o't. I'm no meaning in siller," added Miss Jean, hurriedly. "I wadna encourage a mercenary spirit—ye ken that—but in guid will, Sandy—guid will; and guid will's a grand

thing amang relations; and the ham's no ill eating. They would get it cheap yonder away noo—far cheaper than the like of you or me?"

"You see," said Uncle Sandy—with elaborate skill, as he thought, good simple heart, "they would have nane but the very finest, it being for you, Miss Jean, and so I cannot undertake to say it was cheap—when ye get the best of anything, it's seldom to call cheap."

"Ye're a grand man to learn me, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, with a laugh of derision. "Me, that have been a careful woman a' my days, never gieing a penny mair for onything than what it was worth to me. I've heard the like of you, that pretend to be philosophers, arguing against ane, when ane wanted to prig down a thing honestly, that what was asked was naething mair than the thing's absolute worth. But what have I to do wi' absolute worth? What is't worth to *me*? That's my wisdom, Sandy Muir; and to hear you, that everybody kens has just had as little discernment as a bairn, and been imposed on by the hail town, telling *me* what's cheap and what's dear! I reckon if Solomon had been here, he would have found out at last the new thing that he took sic bother about, honest man."

"Weel, Miss Jean, I may have been imposed on—I'll no say," said the old man, looking slightly displeased. "Most folk have, one time or another; but you're no asking what kind of a place they've gotten, nor about the bairns themsels."

"Ye'll think yoursel up the brae, Sandy," said Miss Jean, "uncle, nae less, to a laird; but I'm less heeding, I'm thankful, of the vanities of this world. Is't a' guid brown earth the lad's siller comes from, or is't siller in the bank, or what is it? But you needna tell me about their grand claes and their braw house, for my mind's a different kind of mind from that."

"It's a' guid brown earth, as you say, Miss Jean," said the old man, eagerly seizing this opening to begin his attack; "that is, a' but some houses; and Harry, like a thrifty man, is giving his attention to the land, and says, with good work, it could be made twice as profitable. You will be glad to hear of that, Miss Jean."

"I would be glad to hear it, if I didna ken that nae profit in this world would ever make yon wasteful callant thrifty," said the old woman, leaning back in her chair, and pressing the great borders of her cap close to her face with two dingy,

shrivelled hands. "Do ye think I dinna ken as weel as you that he's gaen and gotten a grand house, and deckit out yon bit doll o' his as fine in ribbons and satins, as if she were a countess? Na, Sandy, I'll no gie up my discrimination. Harry Muir will come to want yet, or you may ca' me a lee."

"No fears of Harry Muir," said the old man warmly. "I have myself, as I was just telling him, two hundred pounds of my ain, besides the garden and the house, and I'll come to want mysel', I am well assured of that, before want touches Harry Muir—but that's no the question; you see he could double his incoming siller in the year, if he could do justice to this farm; and the auld farmer, a Mr. Hunter, a very decent sponisible man, acknowledged the same thing to me, but said he was too old to learn himsel'."

"Twa hundred pounds! do you mean to say that *you're* twa hundred pounds afore the world, Sandy?" said Miss Jean. "Man, I didna think you had sae muckle in ye!—but take you care, Sandy Muir, my man—take you care of the mammon of unrighteousness—it's a fickle thing to haud it sicker enough, and no to haud it ower fast."

And as she spoke, a slight twitch passed over the hard muscles of her face; yet she spoke unconsciously, and had not the remotest idea that she condemned herself.

"And what would be your counsel, Miss Jean?" said Uncle Sandy, not without a little tremor. "It would cost siller at first, you see, to work upon this farm; but no doubt it's sure to answer, being just like sowing seed, which is lost for a time, but in spring is found again in the green ear and blade. The lad is anxious to be well advised, and no begin without good consideration; so what would you say?"

"I'll tell ye what I would say, Sandy Muir," said the miser, spreading back her muslin wings, and leaning forward to him, with them projecting from her face on either side, and her dingy hands supporting her sharp chin; "I would say that a penny saved was as guid as tippence made; and that he should begin now, at the beginning of his time, and lay by and spare, and when he's an auld man like you, he'll hae a better fortin than he'll ever get out of the land. That's my counsel, and that's the way I've done mysel'; and if he makes as guid an end o' his life as I've done o' mine, I'll let you ca' him a thrifty man."

"We'll nane of us be here to call him so," said Uncle Sandy, "we'll baith be in a place where gathered siller is

an unthrifty provision. Whiles I think upon that, Miss Jean."

"Ou, ay, the like of you are aye thinking upon that," said the old woman with fiery eyes; "but I tell ye I'm nane so sure of what may come to pass; for I've seen mony a hopefuller lad than Harry Muir—mony a ane that thought in their ain mind they would read the name on my grave-head twenty years after it was printed there, and I've pitten my fit upon their turf for a' that. I'm no wishing the lad ill—I'm wishing naebody ill that doesna meddle wi' me; but I've seen as unlikely things—and you'll see whether I'm no a sooth prophet, Sandy Muir."

And suddenly withdrawing her hands, and nodding her feeble head in ghastly complacency, the old weird woman leaned back again in her chair.

"God forbid ye should! God forbid it—and spare, and bless, and multiply the lad, and make him an honour and a strength in the land, long after the moss is on my headstane," said Alexander Muir, with solemn earnestness. "And God bless the young bairns and the hopeful," added the old man, eagerly, after a pause, "and them from evil eye that grudges at their pleasaunce, or evil foot of triumph on their innocent graves! And God forgive them that have ill thoughts of the sons of youth that are His heritage—blessings on their bright heads, ane and a'!"

And when he paused, trembling with earnest indignant fervour, the old man's eye fell upon Miss Jean. She had risen to take down from the high dusty mantel-piece a coarse blue woollen stocking which she had been knitting. Now she resumed her seat, and began with perfect composure to take up some loops which her unsteady fingers had drawn out as she took down the stocking. Either she had not listened to Uncle Sandy's fervent blessing, or was not disposed to except at it—certainly she settled down in her chair with feeble deliberation, pulling about her thin cushions peevishly, and with no sign or token about her of emotion of any kind. Her very eye had dulled and lost its fire, and you saw only a very old, miserable, solitary woman, and not an evil spirit incarnate of covetousness and malice, as she had looked a few minutes before.

There was a considerable pause, for the old man did not find it easy to overcome the tremor of indignation and horror into which her words had thrown him, and he now had almost resolved—but for a lingering unwillingness to disappoint

Harry—to say nothing of his special mission. At last the silence was broken by Miss Jean herself.

“Ill times, Sandy Muir, awfu’ ill times; for auld folk, such like as me that have just their pickle siller and naething mair, nae land to bear fruit nor strong arm to work for them, Sandy; the like of such times as thir, are as bad as the dear years.”

Poor, forlorn, worn-out life! unconsciously to herself, the old man’s blessing on the young, whose strength she grudged and envied, had touched a gentle chord in her withered heart. Nothing knew she of what softened her, but for the moment she was softened.

“Are ye getting little interest for your siller, Miss Jean?” said Uncle Sandy, immediately roused.

“Little! ye might say naething ava, and no be far wrang,” answered Miss Jean, briskly. “A puir dirty three pund, or twa pund ten, for a guid hunder. Ye’ll be getting mair for your twa, Sandy Muir, or ye wadna look sae innocent! Where is’t, man? and ye’re an auld sleekit sneckdrawer, after a’, and ken how to tak care o’ yoursel.”

“I ken ane, Miss Jean, would gie ye five pounds for every hundred, and mony thanks into the bargain,” said the old man, his breath coming short and his face flushing all over with anxious haste; “and a decent lad and landed security. I might have told you sooner, if I had kent; but, you see, I never thought it would answer you.”

“Answer *me*! I find guid siller answer me better than maist things that folk put their trust in,” said Miss Jean, laying down her stocking, and lifting up the frosty cold blue eyes, which again twinkled and glimmered with eagerness, to the old man’s face. “Ye ken ane; and does he gie *you* this muckle for your twa hunder pounds?”

“Na, my twa hundred is out of my ain power, in the Ayr bank; besides, its mair siller this lad wants—mine would do him nae service.”

“This lad! wha does the auld tricky body mean?” said Miss Jean, fixing her sharp eyes curiously on Uncle Sandy, “five pounds in the hunder—ye’re meaning he’ll gi’e me that by the year, and keep a’ my siller where I never can lay hand on’t again, Sandy Muir?”

“At no hand,” said the old man, with dignity, “the best of landed security, and the siller aye at your call, and the interest punctual to a day.”

Miss Jean's mouth watered and her fingers itched; it was impossible to think of this treasure without yearning to clutch it. "Ane might put by thretty pounds in the year," she said musingly. "And how do you ca' this lad when ye name him, Sandy Muir?"

"I've seen his name in the papers," said the old man, with mingled exultation and anxiety, "and there it stands, 'Harry Muir Allenders, Esq., of Allenders,' but at hame here we call him your nephew and mine, Harry Muir."

Miss Jean uttered a passionate cry, rose from her seat, and flung the stocking with all her feeble might in the face of her visitor. "Eh, Sandy Muir, ye auld, leein, artful, designing villain! was't no enough that ye came ance already wi' your lang-tongued writer and reived my house of guid papers that were worth siller, but ye would come again, ye smooth-spoken, white-headed hypocrite, to seize my very substance away from me, and take bread out of a lone woman's mouth to make a great man of a graceless prodigal? Ye auld sinner! ye hard-hearted thieving spoiler, that I should say so! how how dare ye come to break a puir auld woman's heart, and tantalize the frail life out of me, wi' your lees and deceits about siller? Oh, Sandy Muir?"

And Miss Jean threw herself down once more in her hard chair, and began to wipe the corners of her eyes; for the disappointment of her ruined expectations was really as hard upon her miserable soul as the failing of fortune or fame is at any time to its eager pursuer, who has just lifted his hand to grasp what Fate remorselessly snatches away.

"Ye'll come to yoursel, Miss Jean—ye'll come to yoursel," said Uncle Sandy quietly, as he laid the stocking on the table.

And after another burst of fierce invective, Miss Jean did come to herself.

"And he had to send *you*—he couldna get a decent writer to take up such an errand for him! but I'll see him come to want, as a waster should, and he need nae ask charity from me!"

"Nor never will," said the much-enduring Uncle Sandy; "and Mr. Macer, whom ye ken weel, Miss Jean, for the first writer in this haill town, is instructed on the subject. Maybe that may satisfy ye, if ye dinna believe me; but it might be best when he comes to see ye, no to throw your wires at *him*."

"Weel, Sandy Muir, ye're no such an ill body after a',"

said Miss Jean, with a shrill laugh; "and what better did ye deserve, ye auld sinner, after pitting me in such grand hopes? But if there's land to trust to, past yon prodigal himself—and I wouldna gie a strae in the fire for *his* bond—and your ain undertaking, and your twa hundred pounds, Sandy Muir; for ane could aye easy take the law of you, being close at hand, and neighbour like—I'll no say but I might hearken, if I was secure of my siller."

And with this gracious deliverance, to himself quite unexpected, Alexander Muir gladly left Miss Jean to order the cream for his strawberries, and to write a note to Harry. The old man drew a long breath, and wiped his brow with the most grateful sense of relief when he once more stood at the door of his own garden, and saw the table spread upon the green, and the expectant girls only waiting the permission of his presence to plunge down among the green, cool strawberry leaves, and bring forth the fragrant fruit. Good Uncle Sandy looked round upon the young bright heads with a swelling heart, and said "blessings on them" once more. The evil thoughts of Miss Jean's envious and unlovely age struck the old man as if with a vague presentiment of danger. His heart stretched out strong protecting arms around them. "Yea, children are God's heritage," he said to himself in encouragement and hope; and Maggie, and Beenie, and Beatie and Mary, all felt a more delicate tenderness than usual, in the smiles and kind words of their entertainer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

I've seen the morning, with gold the hills adorning,
And loud tempests roaring before parting day.

SONG.

"Success to Uncle Sandy—he has done it!" cried Harry, with exultation, as he threw Uncle Sandy's note, which he himself had just glanced at, across the table to Rose. "Read it aloud for the general edification, Rosie. My uncle has always some good counsel for us."

And Rose, upon whom this duty generally devolved, put little Harry into Martha's lap, and read the letter.

"MY DEAR HARRY:—I have just come home from seeing Miss Jean; and to put you out of pain, I may as well say at once that, to my great astonishment, she has consented like a lamb; so that I called on Mr. Macer, on my road home, and told him he might go the very same afternoon and conclude the matter; and I suppose you will get the siller very soon. But Harry, my man, mind what I said to you, and take good thought and competent counsel before you begin to lay it out, for I have heard folk say that ye may sow siller broadcast on land, and if it's no wisely done, you may be left ne'er a hair the better after all. I do not pretend to be learned about farming; but mind, Harry, and take good advice before you begin to spend this siller.

"Your propine of the ham was very well taken, and did me good in my errand; but I will never wish *you* an errand like it, Harry. Poor old desolate woman, it makes my heart sore to see her strong grip of the world, and worse than that, her grudge at you and the like of you, for the strength and youth which Jean Calder had in her day, but could not hoard like siller. I cannot get this out of my head, for it aye rejoices me myself to see the new life springing, and my heart blesses it; and Jean Calder, if years are anything, should be nearer the end than me.

"Ye may tell Violet and Katie that the bairns here are just laying the table in the garden, and that we are all to get our four hours' of strawberries and cream. So being a little wearied after my battle with Miss Jean, and the bairns being clamorous for me outbye, and besides the first part of this letter being what will most content *you*, Harry, the rest of the bairns will make allowance for me if I say no more at the present writing.

"ALEXANDER MUIR."

"Well done, Uncle Sandy! He is the prince of plenipotentaries!" said the triumphant Harry, who, in the meantime, had opened another letter. And here's a note from Charteris. He's coming to-day to pay us a visit, Agnes. You must give him the best room, and do him all honour—but for him, we might never have seen Allenders. Does anybody know, by the bye, what first set Charteris to search for the heir? Do you, Rosie?"

"Harry, *me!*"

Rose hastily drew little Harry upon her lap again, and looked very much amazed and innocent; but the colour rose

over her face, and the small heir of Allenders felt her brow burn as he pulled her hair. His father laughed, and pulled Rose's dark love-locks too.

"Never mind then, we can ask himself; but, Rose, we must take care that no hostile encounter takes place between Charteris and Gibbie Allenders—that would not do, you know."

A sudden frown contracted the forehead on which little Harry's hand grew hotter and hotter. The very name of Gilbert Allenders had grown a bugbear to Rose, for he had already paid them repeated visits, and was every time more and more demonstrative of his devotion to herself.

"Now, little ones, are you ready?" said Harry. "Come, we shall drive you in to school to-day; and who else will go with me? you, Agnes, or Rose? We will stay in Stirling till Charteris comes, and bring him home."

"Not me," said Rose, under her breath, "not me." She said it as if she was resisting some urgent solicitations, and very resolute was the heroic Rose, who in ordinary circumstances thought a drive to Stirling a very pleasant thing.

"Nor me either, Harry, for I have something to do," said Agnes; "and besides, I don't want to be an hour or two in Stirling. Go yourself, and take the children; and Dragon thinks, Harry, that Violet's pony should be put to the little old gig to take them to school, for they cannot walk always, Dragon says; and it won't do to have a pillion, as Lettie proposed."

"But, Harry, I think it would, and Katie thinks it would," said Violet, eagerly; "and I would ride behind the one day, and Katie the other. And what way could we no do as well as the lady in young Lochinvar?"

"The lady in young Lochinvar did not run away every day, or I dare say even she might have preferred a gig," said Harry. "And besides, she had no pillion. I think we must have another pony for Katie—that will be the best plan."

"Eh, Violet!" Little Katie Calder looked down at her printed chintz frock, and struggled to restrain the laugh of delight which was quite irrestrainable; for Katie had other frocks now much grander than the chintz one, and the little handmaiden of Miss Jean believed devoutly that she had come to live in fairy-land.

Their school was about two miles off, on the Stirling road—a famous *genteel* school for young lady boarders, where only these two little strangers were admitted as day scholars, be-

cause "Allenders" was landlord of the house. Violet and Katie dined with the young ladies at Blaelodge, besides having lessons with them; and they were being practically trained into the "manners" for which good, stiff, kindly Miss Inglis was renowned. On this particular morning the children ran to their room for their bonnets, and collected their books from the sunny window in the hall, just beside the door, which they had chosen for their study, with a considerable flutter of excitement; for to have "the carriage" stop at Blaelodge, and Harry himself, the most dignified of mortal men in the eyes of both, seen by all the young ladies at all the windows taking care of them, was quite an overwhelming piece of grandeur.

"He'll take off his hat to Miss Inglis," said Katie, reverentially, "I saw him do that once, Violet, to the Minister's wife."

"Eh, I've lost my grammar," said Violet, in dismay. "Katie, do you mind where we had it last? And there's Harry ready at the door."

"When we were sitting on the steps at Dragon's room last night," said the accurate Katie, "yes, I ken, and I'll run, Lettie."

"I'll run myself," said Violet, stoutly; and there immediately followed a race across the lawn, which Lettie, being most impetuous, threatened at first to win, but which was eventually carried by the steadier speed of Katie Calder.

The Dragon himself, taking long, feeble, tremulous strides over the dewy turf, met them half way, carrying the lost grammar.

"Ay, I kent it was near school time," said old Adam; "and what should I pit my fit on, the first thing this morning when I steppit out o' my ain door, but this braw new book? What gars ye be such careless monkeys? And it might just as easy have tumbled down off the step to the byre door, and had the brown cow Mailie tramp on't instead o'me—and then ye never could have looked at it again, bairns. I wish you would just mind that a' thing costs siller."

"Eh, Dragon, Harry is to take us to Blaelodge in the carriage," said Violet; "for Harry is going to Stirling to bring home Mr. Charteris to stay a whole week; and you mind Mr. Charteris, Dragon?"

"That's yon birkie," said the old man. "Is he coming to be married upon Miss Rose?"

"As if Rose would marry anybody!" said Violet, with disdain; "but, eh, Katie! I dinna mind my grammar."

"Because you made him tell us fairy tales last night," said the sensible Katie; "but I had my grammar learned first. Come away, Lettie, and learn it on the road."

"And I'll maybe daunder as far as Maidlin Cross and meet ye, bairns, when ye're coming hame," said Dragon. "And I wadna care, if Mr. Hairy gave ye the auld gig to drive ye ower every morning mysel, and sae ye may tell him."

But Harry, just then, had discovered, by a second glance at Cuthbert's note, that he did not expect to arrive in Stirling till four or five o'clock. "It does not matter, however," said Harry, "I have something to do in Stirling, and an hour or two is not of much importance. Have a good dinner for us, Agnes—perhaps I may bring out somebody else with me. Now, little ones, jump in—and you need not expect us till five."

Agnes stood on the steps, very gay and blooming, in a morning dress which she would have thought magnificent Sabbath-day's apparel six months ago; while Rose, behind her, held up little Harry to kiss his hand to his young father. The window of the dining-room, where they had breakfasted, was open, and Martha stood beside it looking out. She was chiding herself, as she found that all those peaceful days had not yet quite obliterated the old suspicious anxiety which trembled to see Harry depart anywhere alone; and unconsciously she pulled the white jasmine flowers which clustered about the window, and felt their fragrance sicken her, and threw them to the ground. Many a time after, there returned to Martha's heart the odour of those jasmine flowers.

The high trees gleaming in the golden sunshine, the dewy bits of shade, and then the broad flush of tangible light into which their horse dashed at such an exhilarating pace, made the heart of Harry bound as lightly as did those of the children by his side. In this warm and kindly good-humour Harry even hesitated to set them down at the very shady gate of Blaelodge, which the sunshine never reached, even in midsummer, till its latest hour, and gave five minutes to consider the practicability of carrying them with him to Stirling; but it was not practicable—and Harry only paused to lift them out, and bid them hurry home at night to see the strangers, before proceeding himself on his farther way. The in-

fluence of the bright summer day entered into his very heart; he looked to his right hand, where lay the silver coils of the Forth, gleaming over fertile fields and through rich foliage; he looked before him, when his young groom steadily driving on, cut in two the far-off mass of Benledi, and lifted his towering head over the mountain—an unconscious innocent Titan—and Harry's heart ran over like a child's, and he scarcely could keep himself still for a second, but whistled, and sang, and talked to John, till John thought Allenders the merriest and wittiest gentleman in the country side; and John was not much mistaken.

The day passed with the children, as days at school always pass. Violet, very quick and very ambitious, resolved not to lose the silver medal inscribed with its glorious "Dux," which she had worn for a whole week, managed to learn her grammar in some mysterious magical way which the steady Katie Calder could not comprehend; and at last, just as Martha at home began to superintend the toilette which Rose anxiously desired to have plainer than usual to-day, although in spite of her, herself took involuntary pains with it, Katie and Violet gathered up their books, and left Blaelodge. Their road was the highway—a fine one, though not so delightful to Lettie as the narrower bye-lanes about Allenders—but the sun was sufficiently low to leave one side of the path, protected by high hedges and a fine line of elm trees, very shady, and cool and pleasant. So they walked along the soft velvet grass, which lined their road, and lingered at the door of the one wayside cottage, and further on gave loving salutation to the cottar's cow, feeding among the sweet deep herbage, all spangled with wildflowers, and cool with the elm tree's shadow, which made her milk so rich and fragrant, and herself a household treasure and estate. The little village of Maidlin lay half way between Blaelodge and Allenders, a hamlet of rude labourers' houses, untouched by the hand of improvement, where shrewish hens and sunburnt children swarmed about the doors continually. There had been once a chapel here dedicated to the pensive Magdalen, and an old stone cross still stood in the centre of the village, which—though there now remained no vestige of the chapel—retained the Scotticised name of the Saint.

"There's Dragon at the cross," said Katie Calder, who was skipping on in advance, leaving Violet absorbed in a childish reverie behind, "and he's telling a story to a' the bairns."

So saying, Katie, who did not choose to lose the story, ran forward; while Lettie, only half awakened, and walking stright on in an unconscious, abstracted fashion peculiar to herself, had time to be gradually roused before she joined the little group which encircled the Dragon of Allenders.

He, poor old man, leaned against the cross, making a gesture now and then with those strange dangling arms of his which called forth a burst of laughter, and scattered the little crowd around him for a moment, only to gather them closer the next. He was, indeed, telling a story—a story out of the Arabian Nights, which Violet herself had left in his room.

“Ay, bairns,” ye see I’m just ready,” said Dragon, finishing Sinbad the Sailor, with a flourish of those long, disjointed arms. “Ony divert does to pass the time when ane’s waiting, for ye’re aff-putting monkeys, and might hae been here half an hour since—no to say there’s a grand dinner making at the house, and as many flowers pu’ed as would plenish a poor man’s garden, and Miss Rose dressed like a fairy in a white gown, and ilka ane grander than anither. Whisht, wee laddies! do ye no see the twa missies carrying their ain books hame frae the school, and I maunna stop to tell ony mair stories to you”

“Come back the morn, Dragon. Dinna eat them, Dragon, or chain them up in your den. If ye do, I’ll come out and fecht ye!” cried the ‘laddies’ of Maidlin Cross; for those sturdy young sons of the soil, in two distinct factions, gave their fervent admiration to Katie and Violet, and would have been but too happy to do battle for them on any feasible occasion.

“Have they come, Dragon?” asked Lettie. “Has Harry and Mr. Charteris come?”

“Nae word of them, nae word of them,” answered the Dragon. “They’re in at Stirling doing their ain pleasure, ye may tak my word for that. See, bairns, yonder’s Geordie Paxton, my sister’s son, coming in frae the field. He’s very sune dunc the night. Just you look at him as he gangs by, and see what an auld failed man he is, aulder like than me.”

Geordie, laden with his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes, was returning home with those heavy, lengthened, slow strides which almost persuade you that some great clod drags back the heavy-weighted footstep of the rustic labourer. He was a man of fifty, with bent shoulders and a furrowed face; but though their old attendant advanced to him at a pace which

Geordie's slow step could ill have emulated, the children, glancing up at the hale, brown, careworn face of the family father, and contrasting with it their poor old Dragon's ashy cheeks and wandering eyes, were by no means inclined to pronounce Geordie as old as his uncle.

"How's a' wi' ye the day, auld man?" said the slow-spoken labourer. "Aye daundering about in the auld way, I see. And how are ye liking the new family, uncle?"

"No that ill," answered the old man. "I've kent waur, to be such young cratur's; and to tell you the truth, Geordie, I feel just that I might be their faither, and that I'm appointed to take care o' the puir things. Thae's twa o' the bairns, and our Mr. Hairy's wean is weer than them still."

"He has a muckle family in his hands, puir lad," said Geordie. "He'll hae mair o' his ain siller than the Allenders lands, it's like, or he ne'er would live in such grandeur. Your auld man never tried the like of yon, uncle."

"Ay, but Mr. Hairy has a grand spirit," said the Dragon; "and what for should he no have a' thing fine about him, sic a fine young lad as he is? See yonder, he's coming this very minute along the road."

The boys were still grouped in a ring round Maidlin Cross; and as Dragon spoke a shrill cheer hailed the advent of Harry's carriage as it dashed along in a cloud of dust towards Allenders. Harry himself was driving, his face covered with smiles, but his hands holding tight by the reins, and himself in a state of not very comfortable excitement, at the unusual pace of the respectable horse, which he had chafed into excitement too. In the carriage was Charteris, looking grave and anxious, Gilbert Allenders, and another; but Harry could only nod, and Cuthbert bend over the side, to bow and wave his hand to little Violet as they flew past. There was not really any danger, for Harry's horse understood its business much better than its driver did; but Harry himself was considerably alarmed, though his pride would not permit him to deliver up the reins into the hands of John, who sat on the box by his side.

Violet did not think of danger; but, without saying a word to any one, and indeed with a perfect inability to give a reason, she sat down upon the roadside grass, and cried. Dragon, who had added a feeble hurra to the cheer of the boys, bent down his white head anxiously, and Katie sat by her side and whispered, "Dinna greet!" and Geordie looked on in hard,

observant silence. But when Lettie rose at last, and dried her eyes, and went on, neither her young companion nor her old one could glean from her what ailed her. "Nothing—she did not know." Poor little Lettie! she did not know indeed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Oh, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give!
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

SHAKESPEARE.

SULLEN Demeyet lies mantled over with the sunshine which steals gradually further and further westward, pencilling out with a daring touch his rugged shoulders, and throwing into deepest shadow, here and there, an abrupt hollow on his side. The trees of Allenders shadow the river just under the windows, but on either side the sun flashes off the dazzling water, as if it had a resistant power, and could repel the rays and throw them back with disdain and pride. Just now the little Stirling steamer, bound for Leith, has passed those overhanging trees, while up upon their drooping branches, with the momentary force of sea surf, comes a great roll of foaming water displaced by the passing vessel, and rushing along the green river banks after it, like an insulted water-god. There is always some one at the east window of the Allenders' drawing-room when the steamer passes up or down, for it is a pleasant sight, winding hither and thither through the bright links of Forth, with its gay passengers and rapid motion, and gives to the broad landscape the animation which it needs.

By the east window at this present moment, Rose, and Rose alone, occupies the usual place. She wears a white gown, as Dragon said, and if scarcely self possessed enough for a fairy, looks prettier and more delicate than usual, and has a slight tremor upon her, which she can neither subdue nor hide. Agnes, with little Harry in her arms, stands on the turret, eagerly looking out for the returning carriage, while Martha at a lower window watches the same road. Fain would Rose take her place, too, on the breezy turret; fain be the first to read in Harry's eye how he has spent these hours

in Stirling ; but no, Harry is not first just now in the thoughts of his sister. She is not thinking about any one, Rose would tell you indignantlly ; but, nevertheless, she sits here with the most obstinate industry, at the east window where it is impossible to obtain the least glimpse of the road, and trembles a little, and drops her needle, and thinks she can hear every leaf fall, and can tell when a fly alights on the gravel walk, so keen is her ear for every sound.

And now there comes through the drawn curtains of the west window, which at present is full of sunshine, the sound of a great commotion ; and carriage-wheels dash over the gravel, and Agnes flies down stairs, and Harry calls loudly to John, who has sprung from his perch to catch the excited horse by the head, and calm him down, that the gentlemen may alight in safety. The colour comes and goes upon Rose's cheek, and her fingers shake so, that she scarcely can hold the needle, but she sits still ; and though Harry's laugh immediately after rings strangely on her ear, and she listens with sudden anxiety for his voice, Rose never leaves her window—for another voice there has spoken too.

By and bye a sound of footsteps and voices come up the stair, and Rose suddenly commanding herself, raises her head and becomes elaborately calm and self-possessed. Alas, poor Rose ! for the door of the drawing room opens, and the voices pause without, but there only enters—Gilbert Allenders.

Gilbert Allenders and a stranger like himself—an intimate of his, whom he has persuaded Harry into acquaintance with. No one knows that Rose is here ; no one thinks of her, indeed, but the guest of honour who is being conducted to his own room, and who does not at all admire the loud greeting in which Mr. Gilbert Allenders expresses his delight at finding her ; but poor Rose, returning those greetings with intense pride, disappointment and reserve, could almost cry, as she finds herself compelled to be amiable to Harry's friend. And now she has time to grow painfully anxious about Harry himself, and to think of his excited voice and laughter, and to shiver with sudden fear.

While Rose sits thus, Martha, with so still a step that you cannot hear her enter, comes gliding into the room like a ghost. With the old feverish solicitude, the younger sister seeks the elder's eye ; but Rose learns nothing from the unusual gaiety of Martha's face. Indeed this smile, so forced and extreme, and the light tone in which her grave sister immediately be-

gins to speak—speaking too so very much more than her wont—terrifies Rose. The strangers see nothing more than a proper animation, and Gilbert Allenders relaxes and condescends to notice Martha; but Rose steals out in wonder and terror, fearing she knows not what.

There is nothing to fear—nothing—say it again, Rose, that your loving anxious heart may be persuaded. Harry stands by the table in his dressing-room, unfolding a great bale of beautiful silk to the wondering eyes of Agnes; and though Harry is a little more voluble than usual, and has an unsteady glimmer in his eye, and a continual smile, which reminds her of some sad home-comings of old, there is in reality nothing here to make any one unhappy. Nothing—nothing—but Rose's heart grows sick with its own confused quick throbs as she lingers, looking in at the door.

“Come along here, Rosie; look what I have been getting a lecture for,” cried Harry, looking up from the table. “It seems that Agnes needs no more gowns. Come here, and see if there is anything for you.”

And Rose, who was by no means above the usual girlish vanities, but liked to see pretty things, and liked to wear them, went in very quickly—much more anxious than curious it is true, but nevertheless owing to a little curiosity as well.

“Oh, Rose, see what Harry has brought me,” said Agnes, breathless with delight, deprecation and fear: “such a splendid silk, white and blue! but it's too grand, Rose—do you not think so? and this quiet coloured one—it is quite as rich though—is for Martha; and here is yours—pink, because your hair is dark, Harry says.”

And as Agnes spoke, Harry caught up the radiant pink silk glistening with its rich brocaded flowers, and threw it upon Rose, covering her simple muslin gown. To say that Rose's first impression was not pleasure would be untrue—or that she did not bestow a glance of affectionate admiration upon the three varieties of Harry's choice. But the eyes that sought them for a moment sought again with a lengthened wistful gaze his own flushed and happy face. And Harry was considerably excited—that was all—and it was so very easy to account for that.

“But just now, you know, we cannot afford it,” said Agnes, gathering her own silk into folds, which she arranged scientifically on her arm, and looking at it with her head on one side, as she held it in different lights. “I never saw anything so beautiful—it's just too grand; but then the price, Harry!”

"Don't you trouble yourself about the price," said Harry, gaily. "You've nothing to do but to be pleased with them; no, nor Martha either; for do you think, after securing that old wife's siller, that I may not indulge myself with a silk gown or two? And if my wife and my sisters won't wear them, why I can only wear them myself. There, there's some cobweb muslin stuff in the parcel for the two of you, young ladies, and something for Lettie and her friend, and something for our heir; but away with you now, girls, and let me dress, and say nothing about the money."

Ah! hapless Miss Jean Calder! if but you could have heard and seen the doings of this zealous agricultural improver, whose resolute purpose of doubling the value of his newly-acquired lands, drew your beloved "siller" out of its safe concealment, what a wailing banshee shriek had rung then through these sunny rooms of Allenders! Not on strong cattle and skilful implements—not on the choice seed and the prepared soil—but on the vanities you have scorned through all your envious lifetime—to deck the fair young forms, whose gladsome breath you grudge to them—that *your* gold, the beloved of your heart, should be squandered thus! Alas, poor miser! But Miss Jean even now clutches her mortgage parchment, with the glitter of malicious power in her cold blue eyes. Let them squander who will—she has secured herself.

And Martha, even in her heart, does not say "Poor Harry!" No, Martha, for the first time, tries to blind herself with false hope—tries to dismiss all her old anxious love from her heart, and be careless, and take no thought for the morrow. She has determined to think of Harry's errors as other people think—to call them exuberances, follies of youth, and to smile with gentle indulgence, instead of sorrowing in stern despair. For Harry is a man—head of a household; and Martha tries to endure placidly—tries to persuade herself there is nothing to endure—knows that he must be left now to himself, to make his own fate. To-day she sees, as no other eye can see, the beginning of peril, and Harry's excitement, excusable though it may be, and constantly as she herself excuses it, has wrought in Martha a kindred agitation. She will not permit herself to grieve or to fear; but sad is this assumed light-heartedness which Rose trembles to see.

Meanwhile Rose and Agnes, who have carried off Harry's gifts between them, are laughing and crying together over

the store. It may be imprudent—it may be extravagant; but it is “so kind of Harry!” He is so anxious to give them pleasure.

And Mr. Charteris, in the drawing-room, talks to Martha with some abstraction, and coldly withdraws himself from the elegant conversation of Mr. Gilbert Allenders. Cuthbert cannot understand why Rose should avoid him; and he feels the blood warm at his heart with the pride to which neglect is grievous. But, at the same time, he is troubled and depressed, and looks with a yearning he never knew before at the closed door, and speaks little, lest he should lose the sound of the approaching footstep, which he remembers to be so light. The room is full of roses, though now in July their flush of beauty is nearly over. Roses red and white, the delicate blush and the burning purple; but Cuthbert would throw them all into the river joyfully for one glimpse of his Lady Rose.

This love-fit sits strangely on the grave advocate—he does not quite understand how, of all men in the world, it should have found out him—and its effect is singular. It moves him, perhaps by the power of those circumstances which hang over this family like a continual cloud, to a half-sorrowful tenderness for everything young and gentle. It does not occur to Cuthbert to inquire why his constant dream is to comfort, to console, to carry away the Rose of Allenders, and bear her tenderly in his arms out of sorrow and trial. This is the aspect under which he instinctively views the conclusion of his growing affection. Sometimes, indeed, there break upon him fair visions of a bride in the sunshine, a home gladdened by a joyous, youthful voice, and smiles like the morning; but the usual current of Cuthbert’s fancies presents to him a far-off glimpse of happiness, chastened and calmed by suffering; and his hope is to deliver her out of some indefinite gloom and evil, to deliver and carry her home into a gentle rest.

And the shadow of this visionary trouble to come, throws a tender pathos over Rose in the eyes of her true knight. His stout heart melts when he sees her, with an indescribable softening—as if he extended his arms involuntarily, not so much to enclose her for his own content, as to ward off unseen impending dangers, and keep her safe by his care. Nevertheless, Cuthbert feels his cheek burn with quick, indignant anger, and starts and frowns in spite of himself, when he perceives that Gilbert Allenders gives his arm—again with considerable demonstration—to the shy, reluctant Rose.

Harry is new to his duties as host, and perhaps his attention to his guests is slightly urgent and old-fashioned; but Harry is in triumphant spirits, and throws his radiant good-humour and satisfaction over them all like a great light. Not without a secret misgiving at the bottom of their hearts, Rose and Agnes make strong efforts to rise to Harry's pitch, if it were but to persuade themselves how innocent and blameless is Harry's exhilaration; and Martha continues to smile and speak as Rose never heard her speak before. It is quite a gay dinner table.

The time glides on, the ladies leave the dining-room; but when they are alone, after some forced efforts to keep it up, their gaiety flags, and one after another glides to her accustomed seat, and subsides into unbroken silence. It is true that the rejoicings of Violet and Katie over the new frocks which Harry has not failed to bring for them, make a little episode, and sustain the animation for a short time—but the sure reaction comes; and now they sit still, one professing to read, and the others working, but all casting anxious looks towards the door.

By and bye comes laughter and voices and ringing footsteps up the stair, but only Charteris enters the drawing-room; for Harry and his other friends are climbing further up to the turret, where he has fitted up a little "den," as Gilbert Allenders calls it, for himself. And their good friend, Mr. Charteris, looks very grave; they think Harry has lowered himself in Cuthbert's eyes—they think this seriousness is the painful regret with which a strong man sees a weak one sink under temptation; and their hearts flutter within them with restless anxiety, and they listen to Harry's laugh in the distance till its echo makes them sick. While, all the time, Cuthbert is too much interested not to notice how uneasily the young wife moves upon her chair, and the abstraction from which Martha starts with a dismal resolution to be gay again. Poor Harry! But Cuthbert stands behind the chair of Rose, and feels that he is consoling *her*—feels that he is occupying with his presence something of the space which, without him, might have been wholly given to anxiety and fear.

The children are already out under the windows, playing on the lawn; and, at Cuthbert's suggestion, Rose and Martha accompany him to the mall on the river-side. He tells them how he admired this when he came first with Harry to see Allenders, and that he often fancies how they must enjoy this

verdant cloister when he is shut up in his office at Edinburgh. The sun slants in through the great oak which rounds the end of the mall, and just touches here and there a heavy alder leaf, and lights up one little branch upon a stately elm, with tender golden rays, cool and dewy; and there is wind enough to disturb the long willow branches and ruffle the fleecy lining of their leaves. A narrow strip of path, sandy and yellow, breaks the soft green turf which slopes down to the water on one side, and on the other, rich with flower-beds, stretches up in a slight incline to the walls of Allenders; and Cuthbert, with Martha on his arm, walks slowly, silently, looking after the white figure which has strayed a step or two before. Slightly turning towards them, with a shy, half-conscious look backwards, Rose says something to Martha about the wild flowers in the grass; and Rose guesses, with a tremor, that Cuthbert has had visions of herself under the shadow of these trees, and feels that his eye just now is dwelling upon her, and that he is saying words to her in his heart. But the charmed silence lasts, and even Martha, looking on, has not the heart to break its spell.

But look up yonder at the turret. With the sun glancing in his hair, Harry stands in the little battlemented gallery, and holds up a glass of sparkling wine, and bows and smiles, and drinks to them. Immediately both the sisters look at Cuthbert; and Cuthbert, with a gaiety he does not feel, takes off his hat, and returns the salutation with playful stateliness. His gesture cheers them, and they become again quite tremulously glad, when he calls to Harry to come down, and Harry nods in assent, and disappears upon the turret stair. It is true that the momentary smile flits away from Cuthbert's face, and he becomes very serious. But they are looking for Harry—they do not see the deep regret and gravity which clothes the brow of his friend, who, within himself, says "Poor Harry!" with a heavy sigh.

And Harry is now more excited than ever, and they are constantly calming and soothing him to keep him within bounds—trying to be gay themselves that his unreal gaiety may be less marked—are carefully avoiding everything which could possibly irritate his feelings. Poor Harry! some wistful eye is always following him, some solicitous voice constantly interposing to bring down to the ordinary quietness and moderation his unconscious extravagance—eyes which are afraid to meet—afraid to confide to each other, even by a

glance, this new pain which Harry has brought upon them; for hitherto they have seen principally the remorse which followed his fall, and never before have beheld others conscious, of what so greatly humiliated themselves. Now the sneer and patronizing forbearance of Gilbert Allenders, who has too cool a head to be moved as Harry is, chafes Martha beyond endurance, and excites the gentle little Agnes to such a pitch of anger, that her hand clenches involuntarily, and she could almost strike him in a burst of weeping petulance. But the long, long painful hours pass away, and at last it is night.

"It is nothing—it is nothing. Nobody thinks anything of this but us. We are always so anxious!" sobs Agnes, as she wakes in the middle of the night, and weeps; but Martha, who does not need to wake—who has never slept—suffers her heart to say nothing, but only prays, and tries to forget—tries to think of anything rather than Harry; and cannot weep if she should try for ever.

CHAPTER XXX.

And gentle hands the breakfast-rite begin,
Then the bright kettle sings its matin song,
Then fragrant clouds of Mocha and Souchong
Blend as they rise.

ROGERS.

"Who is that out there, leading the horse?" asked Agnes, with some anxiety.

The snowy linen and bright silver and china of the breakfast-table sparkle in the sunshine. At a corner, Violet and Katie sit before a covered tray, hastily taking their porridge; for the breakfast is much later than usual this morning, and the children are in great haste, lest they should be too late for school. Rose is working at the corner window—the new window, where the white rose bush nods up to her, and lays a snowy fragrant present of buds upon the window-ledge; but Martha stands silently, as she stood last morning, to watch Harry go away, and again pulls with unconscious fingers the jasmine flowers.

"Who is that?" repeated Agnes.

It is only a groom leading up and down, on the broad gra-

vel walk at the other side of the lawn, a fine horse, stately and impatient, which scorns its limited space, and paws the gravel disdainfully, and arches its proud neck to the infinite admiration of the Dragon and John, who stand by the holly hedge as spectators. Katie and Violet, attracted by the repetition of Agnes's question, rush from the window to the door to ascertain; and after a brief conversation with Dragon, Violet returns, breathless, with the information, that it is a new riding-horse, sent out this morning from Stirling, where Harry bought it yesterday; but that Dragon says it is too wild a horse for any but a bold rider, and that it is sure to throw Mr. Hairy.

"Tell Dragon he's an old fool, and that he had better think what he says," said Harry himself, who suddenly made his appearance as Violet spoke; "and you Lettie, mind your own business and don't be so officious in reporting what everybody tells you. Why don't you get these children off to school, Agnes? Yes, it's my horse. I hope no one has any objection."

Poor Harry! in this morning light, his own conscience has weighty objections, and upbraids him with folly and extravagance. But Harry feels miserable, and is not well—angry with himself, and defiant of all around him—and he feels himself bound in honour to defend his horse.

But no one attacks it; poor little Agnes is only anxious and deprecatory, eager to smile away his impatience, and cheer the depression which she very well knows is sure to follow; while Martha still stands at the open window, without ever turning her head, and vacantly draws the long, pliant branch of jasmine through her fingers, and says not a word.

"They are just going away," said Agnes, hastily tying on the bonnet which Lettie had brought in her hand; "they have just breakfasted, you see, Harry. We are rather late this morning; and Mr. Charteris is not down stairs yet."

Harry left the room immediately, and went out. The arrival of this horse did him good—dispersing the clouds of his depression, and its consequent ill-humour—and before he returned to the breakfast-room, Harry had consoled his conscience by a resolution to begin immediately his agricultural labours, and to spend no more of Miss Jean's money, except lawfully, on the object for which he borrowed it.

When he re-entered the room Cuthbert was there, and Harry had to smooth his brow and welcome his guest. Agnes

still half trembling, and growing talkative in her anxiety to restore ease to the conversation, found herself, to her great delight and astonishment, seconded by Martha, as they took their places round the table. And the still composure of Martha's manner did more for this end, than the tremulous eagerness of the little wife. They regained the every-day tone, the every-day level of quietness and repose; and Agnes began to flatter herself that nothing unusual had happened last night after all, and Harry to think that his conscience blamed him unjustly; only the sickness in Martha's heart lay still, uneased, and undisturbed. She was done with struggling—now she had only to wait for what it pleased God to reveal.

Charteris was to stay a week, and numerous excursions were discussed at the breakfast-table. It was a relief to them all, to have these things to speak about; but Cuthbert exerted himself to-day to gain the confidence of Harry, and did in some degree gain it. They spoke together of the projected improvements; and though Harry said with a little braggadocio that it was "an old rich aunt" who had given him the necessary capital, he was tolerably frank about his intentions, and very glad to receive introductions to some agricultural authorities whom Cuthbert knew. They walked together over the farm which the tenant was to leave at Martinmas, and together commented on the lean and scanty crops, which sparsely covered the half-cultured soil. It was a fresh, showery day, enlivened by a light breeze, which brought down the chiller breath of the hills over the green lowland country; and as this wind waved about his hair, and blew the sparkling rain against his cheeks, Harry struggled under the uneasy burden on his heart, and tried to throw it off, and let it vex him no more. "Forgetting the things that are behind," he muttered to himself, as they paused on a little eminence, and saw the sun touch into brilliant light a thousand rain-drops among the waving corn, and on the roadside trees—for still a heavy consciousness gnawed at his heart, and compelled him to try some bargain with it for rest—and Harry gladly turned to look away from the past, into the broad life which lay before him, as bright as this sunny strath, though, like it, dewed with tears; and in the future his sanguine eyes again saw nothing but hope.

"Forgetting the things that are behind!" Alas, poor Harry! for it was only too easy to forget.

But there followed a few days of cheerful activity, the first

of which dissipated into thin air the last remnant of Harry's remorseful consciousness—for Cuthbert and he rode together to call on some of the agricultural authorities before mentioned, and take counsel with them—not always sweet—concerning all the processes of the warfare which should subjugate this stubborn soil; and Harry advertised in the local newspapers for a manager to take charge of his farming operations, and heard of one before his advertisement was printed, so suitable, as it seemed, in every respect, that Harry, fearing he might not wait till Martinmas, engaged him out of hand in July, that no one else might seize on such a treasure.

Not only so—but Harry, whose pride had been greatly hurt by Dragon's implied opinion that he was a timid rider, subdued his horse, at no small cost to his own nerves, and rode a dozen miles to a cattle show, partly in self-assertion, partly to acquire some knowledge of "the beasts," which his agricultural instructors discoursed of so learnedly; but Harry was not the man to study beasts, and his long ride exhausted him, though it was a triumph. He had settled matters, however, with his conscience, which now rather applauded than condemned—and Harry was content.

Poor Harry! but when Cuthbert's week was out, he said those words with eyes that glistened, and a yearning heart; for Harry was born to be loved, and amid all his faults, and unconscious selfishness of his indulgences, he never lost this natural portion.

And Cuthbert, leaving behind him a bright, cheerful, hopeful household, as ready to be exhilarated as depressed, had said nothing to Rose—for he himself had little yet to share with any one, and he was afraid to risk his affectionate interest with the family as friend and counsellor, even for the chance of attaining the nearer and still more affectionate connexion for which he hoped. And Cuthbert, in his tenderness of protection and succour, exaggerated the difference between his age and hers; he only thought himself likely to succeed at all, by the gentle and gradual process of wooing, which might accustom and attach her to him before she was aware. So he went away quietly, leaving, it is true, many tokens which spoke to Rose a strange, unusual language, showing her how much space she occupied in the heart and thoughts of this man who, of all men she had ever seen, held the highest place in hers. And Rose trembled and smiled with indefinite delight as words

and looks came to her remembrance—looks and words which Cuthbert had feared would alarm and startle her, but which even his self-command could not restrain. There is a charm in this guessed and implied affection which perhaps no certainty has ; and Rose, whose thoughts had not yet taken shape or form, whose shy, womanly heart shrank even from believing itself beloved, and who would have denied the belief strenuously, had she asked herself the question in so many words—Rose suffered a bright mist of reverie to float about her, and was thrilled now and then with apprehensions and revelations, starting out half-distinct for a moment, and anon disappearing into the sunny maze. It was an idle mood, and sent her straying along the river-side and seated her for hours together under the oak, with vague smiles and blushes flitting over her face, and many a dream in her heart ; but yet her needle flew swiftly too under this mist, and she could be very well content with silence, for the long indefinite musings of her romance were sweet to Rose.

CHAPTER XXXI.

A good old man, Sir ; he will be talking ; as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out.—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

“AND, Dragon, you mind you promised the very first day—but you never told us yet the story of the Lady’s Well.”

“Have you ever been to see it, bairns ?” asked the old man.

The children were seated on the outside stair, which led to Dragon’s room. Violet, at least, sat on the upper step, with a book on her lap, and a total disappearance of feet, which suggested a suspicion that Lettie patronized the Turkish manner of seating herself rather than the English. Katie, who had a larger share of boldness than her friend, was jumping from the stair to the ground, mounting a step higher for every leap, while Dragon stood on the threshold of his own door, dangling his thin long arms, and talking to them with his usual animation. It was not yet the hour “when the kye come hame,” and the two little girls, who constantly attended Mysie during the process of milking, were waiting for her appearance ; besides that, they very generally chose to learn their lessons on

Dragon's steps, having a facility of interruption here which they could attain to in no other place.

"Eh, no—we've never been there!" cried Katie; "and Mysie's no away yet to bring the cow. We've plenty time. Will you come, Dragon, and let us see it now?"

"I'm no heeding—if you're sure you would like to gang," said the old man. "But then, how am I to ken that you've got a' your lessons bye, and that it's lawful to take ye? for, you see, bairns that dinna attend to their learning, have nae claim to diversion; and, Missie, you're no dune wi' your book yet."

"But it's just grammar, Dragon," said Lettie, disconsolately; "and it's no use trying to learn it till I'm to say it, for I aye forget till it's just the time. Eh, Katie, you couldna jump off here."

"Ye're nane o' ye gaun to jump and break banes at my door. I'll no hae mysel brocht in for a doctor's bill, like the way the auld maister brocht in Eppie for the muckle bowl she broke," said Dragon. "Gang quiet down the steps, bairns, or I'll no let you come here ony mair. And now, you see, we'll take this road, and we'll sune be at the Lady's Well."

The road was a solitary lane, looking deep and cool under the shadow of high thorn hedges, through which the delicate white convolvulus had darned its fairy leaves and tendrils. Here and there in the hedge-row, an old low oak, long shorn of all its branches, stood alone like some strong ruin, with a growth of pliant twigs, and young foliage waving over the bald trunk as they might have waved over a moss grown wall. The ruddy clouds of the sunset were rapidly fading from the west, and already a meek young moon glanced shyly over the head of Demeyet; but it was still full daylight, and the children skipped along gaily by Dragon's side, keeping an eye on the field, whence Mailie, the brown cow, began to low her impatient summons to her maid; but the maid did not make her appearance, and Violet and Katie went merrily on to the Lady's Well.

The Lady's Well lay under the shadow of an immense old saugh tree, whose whispering, sighing branches were continually bending down with a kind of graceful, melancholy curiosity over the clear spring at its feet. A very narrow strip of path proved that there still came occasional visitors to the little fountain; but the underwood was thick and tangled round it, and the long bramble branches, on which already early berries began to ripen, formed a dangerous network of defence,

closing up even the one entrance, which gave admittance to the small circle of green turf surrounding the spring. But there were signs remaining which told of a time when greater honour was paid to the Lady's Well; for the water bubbled up into a marble basin, and a small carved canopy protected it from the falling leaves. The little girls scrambled through the brambles with eager interest, and Katie bent curiously over the protecting cradle, while Violet sat down upon a stone, which lay beside the basin—a hewn stone, slightly hollowed out in the centre, as if it had been used as a seat for ages. The stillness of the place, shut in on every side by the surrounding wood, and the silvery tinkle with which the water escaped from the hollowed edge of the basin, and passed away in a slender thread over the bleached pebbles of its narrow channel—away under the thick concealing brushwood, disappearing as completely as though the earth had swallowed it again—affected Lettie with strange awe; and so it was not her, but her little companion, who broke the dreamy silence by demanding from Dragon the story he had promised.

“Ye see, bairns,” said Dragon, seating himself on the slender trunk of a young willow, cut down and left there for dead, but which was already throwing out its unquenchable life in long shoots of delicate green, “there was ance a Laird of Allenders, and he had ae only daughter, and her name was Violet. But they never ca’d her Lettie, as they do you, Missie—aye, the full name, like as if she had been a flower; and as bonnie as a flower she was, by a’ accounts, and made ballants and sangs out of her ain head. But, bairns, ye’ll be getting your death of cauld in this dowie place, and then the blame’s sure to come on me.”

“But the lady, Dragon—the lady,” exclaimed Violet, whose interest had been greatly quickened by the lady’s name.

“Weel, as I was saying, there was not anither woman body about the house but hersel, and some servant women—neither mother, nor sister, nor friend; and the auld laird living solitary, and the young ane away in Flanders at the wars; so Leddy Violet ga’ed wandering about the water and the hills, her lane, and had an awfu’ wark wi’ this bit spring, and caused bring the very stane you’re sitting on, Missie,” (a thrill of strange interest passed over Lettie,) “and came ilka day hersel, and drank the water in a silver cup, and sat upon the seat, with her ain thoughts for company, till the spirits that were in the world then, began to take note of her, and tell ane anither of the Lady at the Well. Some say she began to get

wit of them hersel, and saw them watching her out of the trees; but ye maunna believe that, bairns, for it has nae foundation—no a hair of proof, to satisfy ony man that inquired into it.”

“But there came a braw gentleman to the countryside that had a grand castle some way in the Lennox, and great friends among the Highland chiefs; and ae day, when he was gaun wandering by the links of Forth, he heard music in the air, and ga’ed on and on, following after it, till it led him by the very road we came this nicht, and brought him to where Leddy Violet was sitting by the well. And what should this be but a sma’ fairy, that had a lad hersel, nae doubt, and likit Leddy Violet, and didna ken what grand company guid thoughts were, but aye lamented ower the bonnie leddy, her lane and solitary in the wood. Ane canna tell now what kind of spirits thae fairies were, but nae doubt they had discrimination; for it even turned out sae, that the leddy hersel likit the braw lad’s company better than her ain thoughts.”

“Eh, Dragon, are you sure there’s nae fairies now?” asked Katie Calder.

“He’ll tell us the morn. I want to hear about the Lady, Dragon?” said the eager Violet.

“I never saw ony,” said the old man, mysteriously, “whiles I’ve heard folk say—but I’ll no tell you that, or you’ll be feared.”

“What is it, Dragon?” exclaimed both the children in a breath.

“They say in moonlight nights, the fairies have a feast here and get their wine out of the well; and there’s aye some about in the gloaming spreading the tables; but they’ll no meddle wi’ ye, if you’re guid bairns.”

Violet shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked intently under the brushwood, to one spot of bright reflected light upon the water. She did not speak, but with a shiver of fascination and awe watched the slender current steal away under the leaves, and devoutly believed that she had seen the golden vessels of the fairy feast; but even this did not make her forget the story, and again she repeated, “The lady, Dragon, the lady.”

“Weel, bairns, ye see it was the spring season then,” resumed Dragon, “and there was a lang summer time to come—bonnie days—we never have the like of them now—when Leddy Violet was constant at the Well. And the lad—they

ca'ed him Sir Harry—came and went, and lay on the grass at her feet, and courted her, and sang to her, and made his reverence, till she learned to think, poor lassie, that there wasna a man like him in a' the world. So he got acquaint at her father's house, and courted the old laird for her, and was about Allenders night and day; and at last it came to pass that they were to be married.

“Now, ye see, having mair to do now, when she was soon to be a married wife, she never got out to her auld wanderings, but sat with her maids, and saw them make gowns of silk and satin for the grand bridal; and this very same sma' fairy that first brought the gentleman to see her, had cast out with her ain lad by this time, and was in a sorrowful humour, and could not keep her hand from aye meddling with the ledly's concerns. So what did she do, for an imp of mischief as she maun hae been, but flee away to Sir Harry's ain land, and gather I kenna how mony stories of him; for he had been but a wild lad in his young days, and was nae better than he should be even then. And I canna tell ye, bairns, what art magic it was dune by, but this I ken, that it a' came to Leddy Violet's ain ears—every word o't. Now ye maun mind, that for her ain sel, she was like a saint; no a wee new-born bairn, nor ane of the like of you, mair innocent than her, though she was a woman grown. And nae suner had she heard this, than her maid that was wi' her was aware of a sound like the snapping o' a string. Na, missie, ye couldna guess what that was—it was a sairer thing than you ever heard tell o' a' your days—it was Leddy Violet's heart.”

Violet had fixed her dilating melancholy eyes, in which the tears were fast swelling, upon the old man's face, and sat leaning her head upon her hands, bent forward with the deepest attention; while Katie, arrested suddenly in the very act of balancing herself upon the little canopy, turned a look of eager interest upon him, till released by this conclusion she slipped down, and placed herself very quietly on the fallen tree by his side. In his monotonous, half-chaunting voice, the old man proceeded:

“The wedding was put off, and naebody kent what for, for Leddy Violet had a wise heart, and wouldna send him away till she was sure. But there came a gray-bearded man to the gate in the night, and asked to see her—what he said nae man kent; but when the morning broke, Leddy Violet was sitting at her ain window, gripping her hands fast, with a face as

wan as the dead, and the bonnie gold hair upon her head a' covered wi' flakes of white, like snaw. But she rose up and cried upon her serving-woman, and put on her wedding gown. It was a' white and glistening—the auld brocade that you read about in books, wrought with flowers, and grander than you ever saw. And then she put her bride's veil on her head, and went away with a slow, stately step out of Allenders. The serving-woman in fear and trembling creepit away after her, hiding under the hedges along the whole road, and she mindit often that the leddy didna meet a single living person a' the way—for she came straight here to the Lady's Well."

With a shiver of excitement and wonder the children looked round them, and drew closer to Dragon; but the old man went steadily on.

"It was just half-licht, and the woman could see naething but the leddy, with her grand glistening gown and her veil about her head, gaun stately alang the quiet road. When she came to the Well, she sat down upon the stane, and crossed her hands upon her breast, and droopit her head; but there came a noise of folk upon the road at that moment, and Laddy Violet's woman ran to see what it was. She looked east, and she looked west, but there wasna so much as a shadow on the haill way; and then she was scared and feared, and ran without a stop till she wan hame.

"But never mortal man saw Laddy Violet mair."

"Eh, Dragon! where did she go?" cried Katie Calder under her breath; but Violet only cast timid looks round her, and almost thought she could perceive, in the half-light of this other gloaming, glimmerings of the white garments through the close foliage of the trees.

"I tell ye, Missie, nae mortal on this earth kens that," said the Dragon of Allenders; "but, bairns, ye'll be getting cauld—and I'll tell ye the rest at hame."

"Oh, Dragon, tell us the rest," pleaded Violet; but she looked behind her and before, and almost believed she felt the cold hand of the weird-lady laid upon her shoulder.

"They sought her up and down through the whole country, but the wise and auld among them, kent full well that they would never get her; and from that day to this, nae man has ever seen her, nor kens if she is dead, and away to heaven, or if she's living aye a charmed life in the fairy-land. It's my hope she's in heaven this hundred years—but ane can never tell."

"And, Dragon, what about Sir Harry?" asked Katie Calder, timidly.

"Sir Hairy was like to gang distraught. He came here and sat upon that stane, day after day for a whole year; and it was him caused bring the stane bowl, and pit the carved wark ower the spring; and at the end of the year he died.

"That's a' the story, bairns; but, Missie, you that's fond of ballants, there's ane the leddy made, and that her woman heard her rhyiming ower the day she ga'ed away. I have been trying to mind it a' this time. It used to have a tune in the country-side. I could ance sing it grand mysel—and if you'll be awfu' quiet, I'll try—

"The night wind rose among the hills,
But the glen was lown and gray,
When she drew her veil about her head
And went upon her way.
And she has gathered the green willow
To lay on the threshold stane,
And the yew and the rue in the chalmer of state,
That the house might be kent for desolate
When she was lost and gane.

"Oh! father, kindly fare ye well,
Good may your last days be,
And God send your son were hame in peace,
Since ye'll nay joy in me.
And though ye have made a desert, Harry,
And griefs I mayna tell,
Where ance dwelt mony a pleasant thing,
Yet Harry, fare ye well!

"But wae unto the man, Harry,
Within this house shall dwell,
And bears the name that breaks my heart,
Though I say fare ye well!
The night wind cries among the trees,
I ken what words they be,
And I maun hence to bruik your pain,
But wae to him that bears the name
Which is the dead of me."

It was nearly dark now, and the cracked and quivering voice of age rung strangely through the night. Violet felt the leaves rustle about her, and shrank from the elfin touch of the long willow shoots which thrust themselves into her hand, and cast furtive, timid glances round, trembling lest she should see the stately white lady, with her drooped head and

her bridal veil, sitting under the trees. Katie was bolder, and understood the ballad ; but Lettie's attention, constantly drawn to some imaginary stir among the brushwood, or wandering reflection on the water, and arrested by the singular ghostly effect of the old man's shrill voice and ashy face, failed to make anything of the verse which ended his story. The water trickled away unseen under the leaves—the saugh tree turned out its fleecy lining to the night wind, which began to tremble among its branches—mystic flutterings shook the long grass and limber brambles—and Lettie sat on the stone seat where Lady Violet sat before her, and trembled to her very heart. Little Katie Calder, poking about into the dark mysterious underwood, felt only a little pleasant thrill of apprehension, and was not afraid—for Katie could very well trust an imagination which never had played pranks with her ; but an awe of the dark road home possessed Lettie. She was afraid to remain in this weird corner, and afraid to go away.

“Mailie's milkit half an hour since,” said Dragon, getting up with his usual activity, and shaking the long arms which Violet half suspected were fastened on with wires ; “and the haill house will be asteer wondering what's come of us. Bairns, we'll get our licks if we stay langer—and I'm wearying for my parritch mysel.”

But Lettie went along the dark lane, under the high hedge, which might have concealed armies of fairies, and looked behind her with furtive side-long looks, wistful and afraid. The road was very solitary and quiet, but now and then a slow footstep advancing out of the darkness, made her heart leap ; and even when she had reached home, Lettie ran, with unnecessary haste, up the dim staircase, and was glad when bed-time came, and she could lay down her head and close her eyes. But after all, it was quite unsatisfactory to close her eyes ; and as the room was very dark, Lettie constantly opened them to cast anxious glances into the corners, and listened with all her might for the rustling of the lady's silken gown ; but Lady Violet made no appearance to her little relative, except in dreams

CHAPTER XXXII.

"What strong hand can hold his swift foot back?"

SHAKESPEARE.

THE window is up in Martha's room, and the sweet morning air comes in upon you, with a fresh and pleasant abruptness, frank and simple as the sudden laughter of a child. The stir of early day is upon all the country without—birds twittering among the wet leaves, which themselves glisten and tremble in the sun, shaking off the rain which fell heavily through the night—and far-off footsteps and voices, echoing over the fields, of rural people at their wholesome toil. Beside the window, a work-basket stands upon a little table, and you will wonder when you see it full of the embroidered muslin—the delicate "opening" at which Martha and Rose were wont to labour. It is an elaborate collar which Martha holds in her hand, and she is working at it with silent speed, as she used to do. You would fancy, to look at her now, that the family change of fortune had brought little ease to her.

But upon a sofa, at a little distance, Rose, with a fresh morning face, and pretty muslin gown, is spreading out Harry's present—the rich, grave-coloured silk, which has been made into a dress for Martha. And Martha suffers herself to smile, and says its only fault is that it is too good, and that the bairns will not know her when she has it on. Katie Calder, at Rose's side, draws out the folds reverentially, and says, with awe, under her breath, that it is "awfu' bonnie;" but Violet sits on the carpet at Martha's feet, and thinks about the lady at the well.

For this is a holiday, and the children have no dread of school or lessons before their unembarrassed eyes. In the next room sits a Stirling dressmaker, who has condescended to come out to Allenders, to make up into gowns the glittering silks of Harry's present; and Katie has already spent an hour in the temporary work-room, appearing now and then, to report the shape of a sleeve, or to exhibit a specimen of some superlative "trimming." It is quite a jubilee to Katie.

But Violet, in an Oriental attitude, like a small sultana, sits on the carpet, and stoops both head and shoulders over

the book on her knee ; which book, for lack of a better, happens to be a quaint essay of Sir Thomas Browne's. All the light literature contained in the old Laird of Allenders' bookshelves, has been devoured long ago, and Violet concluded "Hydrotaphia" to be better than sermons—a conclusion which she is now slightly inclined to doubt. But Lettie is a little dreamy and meditative this morning, and is thinking of Dragon's story, and of Lady Violet's ballad ; wondering, too, with secret excitement, whether she could make a ballad herself, and repeating over and over again a single ecstatic verse about the moon, of her own composition, which Violet thinks, with a thrill, sounds very like poetry. When Martha stops to thread her needle, she lays her hand caressingly upon Lettie's head, and bids her sit erect, and not stoop so much ; and Lettie is almost encouraged to repeat this verse to her, and hear whether Martha thinks it is like poetry—almost—but she is never quite sufficiently bold.

The door opens with a little commotion, and Agnes, with care on her brow, comes hurriedly in. The room has been so perfectly peaceful that you feel at once the disturbing element, when the young wife enters, for Agnes is excited, impatient, perturbed. She has just been having a controversy with Harry, and comes here, half crying, at its close.

"He says he's going to Edinburgh to-day with Gilbert Allenders ; I hate Gilbert Allenders," said the little wife, in a sudden burst. "He is always leading Harry away. He is going to the races, and yet he says he doesn't care a straw for the races. Oh, will you speak to him, Martha ?"

"It is better not, Agnes : he will take his own way," said Martha. "It is best I should not interfere."

"He says we all heard Gilbert Allenders ask him, and that I knew well enough he intended to go, and that you knew, Martha. I told Harry I was sure you did not ; and what pleasure will he have at the races ?"

"I wish Gilbert Allenders were in America, or in China—or in London, if he likes it better," said Rose, quickly.

"That's because he wants to fall in love with you," said Agnes, with a light laugh, diverted for the moment by the fervour of Rose's good wishes for the fascinating Gilbert ; "but I am sure I would not care where he was, if he was only away from Harry ; and Harry does not like him either. Rose, we're to try to gather a big basket of strawberries for Mrs. Charteris, and I think, maybe, Martha, if Harry goes *there*, that he may get no skaith in Edinburgh."

Rose came shyly to the table. "If it had only been a week sooner! or if we had not pulled so many berries on Saturday!"

"We must take what we can get," said Agnes; "and the basket is standing below the walnut-tree. Will you not say anything to Harry, Martha?"

"I will see him before he goes away," said Martha, laying down her work.

And Violet sprang up and threw "Hydrotaphia" into the work-basket, and called upon Katie Calder, who just then ran out of the work-room with a little paper pattern in her hand, of a bonnet which she designed manufacturing for a great doll, joint property of herself and Lettie. Lettie, with her books and her reveries, gave but a very inconstant regard to this doll; it was often thrown for a week together upon the less capricious attention of Katie Calder.

Harry was standing by the dining-room window, with a sprig of jasmine in his breast, looking slightly ruffled and impatient, but still very bright and animated; and as Agnes passed him, carrying the basket, he patted her shoulder playfully, and called her a good girl, after all. Poor little Agnes! she was not sure whether it was best to laugh or cry.

"So you are going, Harry?" Martha paused beside him, and leaned against the jasmine-covered wall.

"Yes, I am going. Why, Martha, I am not a child; why do you constantly look so wistful and anxious? It's enough to make a man stay away altogether," said Harry, angrily.

"Is it? A man, I suppose, must have very little inducement to stay at home, when that is enough to send him away," said Martha, coldly; "but, Harry, your friend Gilbert Allenders annoys Rose—could you not restrain him, if you bring him here again?"

"Is that all?" said Harry, laughing. "Gibbie's not such a bad fellow, Martha; and the doctor will give him half of his practice, and he's sure to be steadier in a year or two. Well, I should *not* like Rose to have anything to do with him, that is true; but still he may have his chance as well as another. Have you anything to say to Charteris, Martha?"

"Nothing; but you will go there?" said Martha, eagerly.

"Oh! of course—the old lady would not be pleased; but then I can't take Allenders there—if it was only on account of Rose;" and Harry laughed again. His impatience was wearing away. He was quite good-humoured and light-hearted now.

Meanwhile the light glimmers through the trees upon Rose's head, bending over the great basket, and upon the wet leaves, from which she shakes the last remaining rain-drops, as she places them under the fragrant fruit; and it is singular now, when the basket is full, to observe how careful she is in choosing those leaves, and how she scatters little bits of oak, tender brown and green, and spreads cool twigs of plane tree over the strawberries, and sends Violet away stealthily to gather white jasmine blossoms, and strew them on the fruit. Violet, nothing loth, twists a long bough of jasmine round Rose's dark hair, and Katie suggests cabbage-leaves to cover up the basket; which suggestion, prosaic as it is, has to be carried out, and so the basket is borne away.

The day after to-morrow Harry promises to return, and they watch him go away with doubt and pain; but he himself is very cheerful, and speaks so confidently of what "I" will do, and evidently feels himself so dignified and independent a man, that they are comforted. "Everybody else in Harry's station does the same thing," says Agnes, a little proudly, and Martha assents with an averted face, and they separate in silence—the one to occupy herself pleasantly with little domestic cares, the other to take up her work again, and sit at her open window, and pray in her heart.

But Rose has wandered to the mall, and sits under the oak tree, which rounds its termination. They have made a little seat there under the thick foliage, where there is always shade; and Rose, not without a compunction about the work which she should be doing, either to help Martha or the dressmaker, resigns herself to a dream. The water at her side glides on. She can see it floating past her, through the loving leaves which droop over it, and dip into its dazzling tide; and at her other hand, the spear head glitters on the turret, and the glistening lime-tree throws its wet boughs abroad, and shakes them in the face of the brave sun. Then there are rays of sober daylight stealing with sidelong quietness through the beeches farther down, and Violet and Katie send pleasant articulate voices into the universal rustle, which the soft air waving about every where, calls forth from the water and the trees.

Behind her is a corn-field, the greatest rustler of all; and Rose hears a heavy foot wading through the scanty grain, chance sown under the hedge. But just then, the children with their unfailing attendant, Dragon, have come close upon

Rose on the other side of the oak, but do not see her, though she hears all they say.

There is a pause of perfect stillness for a moment, and Violet sighs.

"Eh, Dragon!" said Lettie, "I wouldna like to be here in the dark."

"You dinna ken how bonnie it is in the dark, Missie," said the old man, "'specially when there's stars shining, that ye canna tell whether they're in the water or the sky; and there was ance a fairy ring somegate about the steps yonder, and I've heard mony a ane say they had listened lang syne to sair groans out of that oak. They say ane o' the lairds that planted it came by a violent death, and ye can aye hear't make a moan and complaint, at the season of the year when he was killed; but I canna answer for that story—and I never heard the tree say a word mair than ony ither tree, a' my days."

"But listen, Dragon," said Lettie, covering her eyes, "if it was dark, I could think it was the rustling of Lady Violet's gown."

"And it's naething but the corn," said Dragon, with a feeble laugh; "naething but the wind in the corn, and your ain fancy. Ay, but there is anither sound. What would ye say if it was Mailie in among Willie Hunter's corn?"

"I would get a wand, and drive her out again. I would like, Dragon—is it her that's in the corn?" cried Katie Calder.

But Dragon looking over the hedge, already bore testimony that it was not the brown cow, by greeting with great surprise his nephew Geordie.

"I was just coming in bye to say a word to Mysie," said the gruff voice of the labouring man. "Her mother's ill yonder, and ane o' the weans has a fever and the ither a hoast; be a decent body for ance, uncle, and cry her out to me—for I want to tell her she's no to come hame at no hand, on account of the bairns at the house."

"I'll rin," said the active little Katie Calder.

And Katie ran away through the trees, without waiting for permission.

"I passed Allenders in his carriage the noo," said Geordie. "He'll hae siller o' his ain, I reckon, mair than the lands? for it would take a grand fortune to keep up a' yon."

"Ay, he's a fine lad, Mr. Hairy," said the old man, "and they're a real biddable family, and dinna scorn guid advice

wherever it comes frae ; and then there's the young lady, Miss Rose, ye ken, hasna made up her mind if she's to be married on the doctor lad out of Stirling, or yon birkie in Edinburgh. I think she's maist disposed to him—and I'll warrant he's a grand man, for he has it in his e'e—nae fear o' Mr. Hairy, when he has a writer married on his ae sister, and sic a wise lady for his ither."

Poor Rose started—but, to do her justice, quite as much because Geordie's remark had opened her eyes to a new danger for Harry, as because Dragon's unhesitating disposal of herself dissipated with a light much too distinct and severe, the indefinite happiness of her dreams.

"Is't true he's gaun to take Allender Mains into his ain hands?" said Geordie. "I hear the land's to bear threple crops when the laird's new manager comes. I'll no say but it might if it was weel lookit after, and I would like to say a word to him mysel about that new harrow and better graith for the beasts. I'm saying, auld man—do ye think Allenders is sure to haud at it, if he begins wi' the farm?"

"Man, he delved and dibbled in the garden ae night for a haill hour!" exclaimed the applauding Dragon.

Geordie shook his head. "I'm no sae sure that's a good sign. And then, ye see, the farming takes siller. I would like to ken if it's true what they say, uncle, that this lad was naething but a puir lad afore he wan to Allenders ; but if he hasna siller o' his ain, he ne'er can carry on at this rate. Ony way, it's a comfort the land maun aye be tilled, and that ane gets ane's bread whaever's maister. But here's Mysie. Guid day to ye, auld man."

"And I'll away in, Missie, to see about my kail," said Dragon. "It's eleven in the day by the sun. Ye should gang to Mysie, and get a piece yoursel."

The old man shuffled away, and Lettie, swinging round the thick trunk of the oak, suddenly came upon Rose. The child's eyes were glistening, dark and wistful, and there was a cloud of the old vague gloom and discouragement upon her face.

"What way do they ask if Harry has siller, Rose?" asked Lettie, anxiously ; "what way do they say he hasna enough? Was Allenders no a grand fortune when Harry got it? and what way is it no a grand fortune now?"

"I cannot tell, Lettie," said Rose, sadly. "Come away, and we'll go in, and you'll read a book to Martha and me."

Lettie put her hand into her sister's quietly, and they

went in together. Martha was still at her window—still working with her old silent assiduity—and Rose drew a chair to the opposite side of the little table, and, greatly subdued and sobered, took up out of Martha's basket, a piece of embroidery, and began to "open" it as busily as of yore. This work was still regularly supplied to Martha by Uncle Sandy in Ayr. It was a satisfaction to her to pursue those unknown labours day by day; and Rose, too, began with a kind of desperate energy—as if such a pittance as she could earn could have any effect upon the fortunes of Harry; but still it was a satisfaction to do what she could.

Katie Calder came in from the garden, flushed and merry, and could not comprehend the quietness which had fallen upon Rose and her little playfellow, though Lettie's changing moods ceased to surprise her constant companion; so Katie resumed her pilgrimages between Martha's room and the dressmaker's, and began her doll's bonnet with great success and *éclat*; while Violet again seated on the carpet, solemnly commenced to read "*Hydrotaphia*" to her quite uninterested auditors; but finding this would not do, suddenly threw it down, and began to tell them Dragon's story.

The sisters listened with quiet pleasure; they did not always understand Lettie, in her reveries and dreamings, and she was naturally shy of speech; but Martha had already been startled on more than one occasion by the strange intuitive perceptions of her youngest "bairn," and she said with an affectionate smile when the story ended, "You will be like Lady Violet, Lettie—you will make ballads too."

A burning flush crossed the child's face, and she did not speak for some time. Then she looked up to say: "Dragon says Harry's no a canny name for the Lairds of Allenders, and there never has been one, Martha, from Lady Violet's time till now."

A cloud passed over Martha's face—a very slight fantastic thing was enough at this time to leave a permanent shadow.

And it was a week before Harry returned; and he came back sullen, gloomy, and exhausted, with nothing to tell them, as he said—nor had he seen Charteris except once, and that on the first day he spent in Edinburgh. Poor Harry! he had not yet expended a farthing on his farming operations, and he dared not think how little remained of Miss Jean's thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,
And then comes both sun and rain.

CARLYLE.

THE autumn passed with many ordinary vicissitudes, with times of peacefulness, and times of trouble; and in the house of Allenders another baby son was born. It was just when Harry was beginning the business of his farm, and after a time of great abstraction and excitement, during which he had visited Edinburgh once or twice, and was evidently occupied with some business which he could not confide to any one at home. But Harry's mind had been lightened before his baby came; the farm-manager had arrived; Geordie, the nephew of the feeble Dragon, had spoken his mind to Allenders about the new harrow and the plough-graith, and had been graciously heard—so graciously, that Geordie immediately decided on an affirmative answer to the question which agitated the whole population of Maidlin Cross, and ever after maintained that “the laird *had* siller o’ his ain, bye the lands, and that he was just living free and openhanded, as a gentleman should live.” It was one of Harry's sunshine times; and many a heart wished kindly wishes for him, as he stood in Maidlin Church, his young wife in her graceful weakness, and his sisters seated by his side, and held up his child to receive the baptismal sprinkling, and to be named with the name of the Lord. “He has the kindest face I ever saw—ane's heart warms to the lad—blessings on him,” said an old woman on the pulpit stairs; and Martha's heart swelled with the echoed blessing.

And there were blessings on him—blessings which many a desolate heart sighed and pined for in vain—blessings of rare love and tenderness, of children fair and hopeful, and in his own person of a competent mind, and of the bright health and youth to which everything was possible. So far as his starting point was concerned, a wonderful realization had come to Martha's ambitious hopes for him; and now it almost seemed to lie with Harry himself to decide what the end of them should be.

In the farm-house of Allender Mains, Harry's farm-manager has already established himself, and from the midst of its

bare trees you see appearing the half-built chimney of the new threshing-mill, the machinery of which has just arrived under charge of two young engineers from Glasgow ; and the slope of the farm-garden, and all the barnyard behind, is lined with great draining-pipes, glancing red through the hoar-frost at a mile or two's distance, upon their slight elevation. And just behind the little byre and stable of Allenders' house, a great range of new stables and byres are rising, to receive the cattle, which Harry has resolved shall be unequalled in the country-side. When the weather is "fresh," you cannot pass a field without seeing the heavy breath of the plough-horses, rising like a mist over the hedge, and hearing the meditative whistle, or uncouth call of the ploughman behind. An air of sudden activity spreads over the little district—so decided and apparent, indeed, that a retired weaver in Stirling has already two new houses in progress, one of which is a little shop, in the very front of Maidlin Cross. The event excited the hamlet to a positive uproar, for never before had any man dreamed of dignifying Maidlin with such a two-storied slated house as slowly grew upon its astonished vision now.

And in the dusk of the winter mornings you see the lanes full of hardy brown children, girded with rough sackcloth aprons—bound for school, you would fancy. No, they are bound for Harry's fields, to "gather stanes," and have each a little "wage" to carry home on Saturday night to the immense delight of mother and child. The fathers are laying drains and ploughing, the elder sisters tend the fine cows in the byre at Allender Mains, and prosperity to which they are altogether unaccustomed falls suddenly upon the startled inhabitants of Maidlin Cross.

And landlords and farmers, startled too, are looking more scrupulously to themselves, lest they be outdone by the newcomer ; the blood stirs in the awakened veins of the country side, and something of emulation, keener than the keenest air of December, strikes into the warm fireside corner, where honest men can no longer take in peace their afternoon's glass of toddy, and its accompanying newspaper, for constant reports of what is doing at Allenders, and what Allenders himself is doing—for Harry's active footstep rings along the frost-bound paths, and Harry's frank salutations scatter good-will among his husbandmen every day ; and steady going agricultural people waken up, and look after their own omissions and neglects, with a half-grudge at Allenders.

It seems that Harry has found at last the life suitable for him. Though the snow lies heavy on the sullen brow of Demeyet, and every blade of grass on the lawn is crisped into distinct identity, and the burn is frost-bound under the trees, and an icy hand restrains the tinkling springlet of the Lady's Well, Harry never fails to visit his fields.

"The best compost for the lands
Is the master's feet and hands,"

he says with a laugh, as he wraps his plaid about him, and sets out in the face of the keenest wind that sweeps out of the highlands, and Agnes, with the new baby on her arm, sits by the fireside with radiant smiles, and Martha looks after him from the window, where now the jasmine clings in long brown fibres to the wall, without a single adorning leaf, and in her heart tries to forget all the dread and all the bitter thoughts which mingled in the summer-time with the sickly odour of those jasmine flowers.

Yet sometimes Harry is abstracted and full of care. They believe that he is thinking then of errors which they believe are now happily past for ever; for no one in the house but Martha, ever remembers, that all these improvements must cost more than Miss Jean's thousand pounds—and Marth finds all her attempts at inquiry evaded. She never can succeed in learning where Harry gets the means of accomplishing so much, and it is only now and then, when an incautious murmur about interest, or legal charges, reaches her, that she has ground for her conjecture that he has borrowed from others besides Miss Jean. But Martha believes with trembling that Harry's mind is changed—that his purposes are no longer fluctuating and unsteady—that he has reached at last the great strength and motive power of the Christian life; and she can trust all lesser things to the regulation of that which is above all.

And they never say poor Harry—never except when they are commenting with full hearts and eyes upon some new proof of Harry's kindness—and then it is said in applauding, grateful love, and not in pity. No longer poor Harry—for is he not a great landed proprietor, making such a stir in his district as no Allenders has done before him for a hundred years? and has not Sir John Dunlop invited Allenders of Allenders to dine with him on Christmas day?

They are very glad it is Christmas day and not the new year—the Scottish family holy-tide—and Harry comes home greatly elated from Sir John Dunlop's where they have treated him with the greatest distinction, like a guest of special honour. Lady Dunlop, too, promises to call on Mrs. Allenders, and Agnes blushes deep for pleasure, and is fluttered and excited, and sings to the baby such a song of triumph, that instead of being lulled to sleep as she intends, he opens his blue eyes wide, and seizing on the lace about her pretty neck, tears it with exultation and delight. Happy baby! young enough to do mischief with impunity! Little Harry, now two full years old, who does not at all admire this supplanting baby, and is still sore about his own dethronement, clenches his fist at him in anger and envy, and is the only person in the fireside circle who has sympathy with Agnes's tribulation about her perished lace.

Next week Cuthbert Charteris is coming for a single day to pay them a visit, for Cuthbert is very busy now, laying the foundation of a great business; and in honour of Cuthbert there is to be a party—the first which they have attempted—when the covers are to be taken off the drawing-room chairs, and Agnes and Rose are to appear in full costume. Youthful and inexperienced as they all are, this is a great event to them, and Agnes innocently reports to Harry various elegancies which she would like to have on her table and her pretty drawing-room, before the notable day; and Harry lays before them a plan of Miss Dunlop's for a conservatory, which she herself has strongly recommended to him. Harry thinks he will set about it immediately, and it will not cost much, and Agnes and Rose are delighted and cannot sufficiently admire the artistic talent of Miss Dunlop.

But to-morrow Harry has to pay fifty labourers—to-morrow a quarter's salary falls due to the farm manager—to-morrow he has promised to pay for some fine Ayrshire cows, now luxuriating in the byre at Allender Mains—and to-morrow, alas! there are two separate dividends of interest, which cannot be postponed—Miss Jean's, and a heavier creditor than Miss Jean.

So Harry retires to his library when they have left him, and chafes himself a little over the trouble of so many complicated concerns, and feels a momentary shiver pass over him, as he wonders how he will do when the great sum he lately lodged in his bank at Stirling shall be exhausted—what

then, Harry? with more than three hundred of interest to pay, and only four hundred and fifty pounds? And Harry's brow contracts for a moment, and a shadow steals over his face; but immediately it brightens. "Why by that time, to be sure, the farm will have doubled its value, and I shall be a rich man," he repeats half aloud, with a short laugh of satisfaction, and going to his writing-table, he puts down in permanent "black and white," a list of the pretty things in silver-work and upholstery, which he has promised to order before Agnes's party, and throwing himself into an easy-chair, reads a novel for an hour with the lightest heart in the world.

While Agnes visits little Harry in his crib to kiss him as he sleeps, and folds the new-come brother into her own bosom, and lies down to her happy rest; and Rose, between sleeping and waking, dreams, with a heart full of sweet anticipations; and Martha in the darkness looks out upon the falling snow, and on the pallid moon lightening Demeyet, and bids the stern voice of her experience be still, and let her hope—Hope! she holds it to her heart with a desperate clutch, as a drowning mother holds her child, and is still, waiting for the will of God.

Not a sound breaks the profound slumber of Maidlin Cross, where Harry's labourers, free of all care for the morrow, lie silent in the deep sleep which compensates their toil. Not a sound disturbs the quietness of Allenders, except that small voice of Violet asking in the darkness if Katie is asleep. Yes, Katie is asleep: shut your dark eyes, Lettie, and say your prayers, that Lady Violet may not come in her glistening garments to sit yonder in the darkest corner, and hold you with her glittering eye; but except for this visionary dread, and the one ache of ancient fear in Martha's graver breast—fear which only dwells far down in the depths, like an echo in a well—this hour of rest sheds nothing but peace upon the home of Harry Muir.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

The Count is neither sad nor sick, nor merry, nor well ; but civil, Count—civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

ON the eve of the important party, Cuthbert Charteris arrived at Allenders.

Half-frozen with his journey, and shaking from his coat large flakes of the snow, which trembled in the air, they took him into the dining-room, where a blazing fire, a late dinner, and the warm and smiling welcome of Agnes greatly solaced the wayfarer. Harry had met him in Stirling, and driven him out ; but Harry's carriage, though it could be closed, was not so comfortable on a December night as in the bright sunshine of a July day. Cuthbert made hurried inquiries after Martha and Rose, in answer to which Agnes began a most animated account of an unexpected call from "young Mr. Dunlop" to say that his sister would be very happy to come with him to Agnes's party. Little Mrs. Muir Allenders, had only ventured at the last moment to invite the baronet's daughter ; and then with but the faintest expectation that Miss Dunlop would come. Agnes was greatly elated ; and Rose and Martha were with Mr. Dunlop in the drawing-room.

But on the peaceful countenance of Cuthbert Charteris there passed a momentary savageness. At this moment it seemed to him, in unconscious self-estimation, that he, as the newly-arrived guest and tried friend, should be the principal person at Allenders—whereas this young Mr. Dunlop, most probably a nobody, as Cuthbert concluded with amiable liberality, defrauded him of his welcome from the sisters, and drew away Harry from his side. It was true that Harry returned in ten minutes, and that Martha and Agnes changed places ; but still Cuthbert involuntarily frowned. Might not Rose, in common courtesy, have come to greet him ? Alas, poor Rose ! for Cuthbert could not tell how she trembled at the bright fireside of the drawing-room, nor how the astonished Agnes threw shawls round her shoulders, and wondered what could make her so cold.

Mr. Charteris lingered long over his dinner. Cuthbert, to tell the truth, was rather sullen, and made by no means a brilliant appearance to Martha and Harry, who sat with him while he refreshed himself. He had a great inclination, indeed, to wrap himself up again in his travelling dress, say a surly good-bye at the drawing-room door, and betake himself home without delay; but Cuthbert disconsolately comforted himself, that it was only for one day, and sat with all his attention concentrated on the sounds from the staircase, doggedly assuring himself that no one would come. And no one did come; and Cuthbert was enraged at the fulfilment of his own prophecy.

By and bye, he went up-stairs, attended by Harry, who did not quite comprehend this singular mood, to his own room; and Rose heard his voice on the stair, and trembled still more and more, though young Mr. Dunlop sat by, and did all that in him lay to engage her attention. But poor Rose felt a great inclination to steal away to her own room and cry; for she in her turn, thought it strange, very strange, that Cuthbert should linger so long, and show so little wish to see her.

And when Cuthbert, his face still tingling from the cold blast without, entered the warm and cheerful drawing-room, and saw young Mr. Dunlop sitting beside the silent Rose, describing to her with animation some storied continental towns from which he had lately returned, the grave advocate felt himself yield to boyish pique and jealous resentment—"Civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion," the tone of his constrained greeting dismayed Rose, and when he had taken her hand in his own somewhat chill one, and let it fall again with scarcely a pressure, he withdrew to the other side of the room, and began to talk to Martha. Rose, who had not been a very good listener before, became worse than ever now—but Mr. Charteris, trying to look very indifferent, occupied himself almost ostentatiously with Martha, and laughed at his own jokes, and became quite exuberant and demonstrative, though he never spoke to Rose.

But Rose would not tell her sister, when she unexpectedly brought a light to their dark room that night, why she was crying; it was for nothing at all, Rose protested—indeed nothing at all—but faster and faster the tears ran down her cheek, and she had much to do to keep back a rising sob. Martha put her hand over the wet eyes tenderly, and did not ask again—for she could guess without explanation, the cause of Rose's tears.

Next day Mr. Charteris rode out with Harry to see the improvements. He was much interested in them, he said, and so he was—far more interested than he felt yesterday when he came.

Cuthbert had been having a consultation with himself during the night—a consultation in which he looked at various circumstances from a point of view exactly opposite to that of Rose. He saw “young Mr. Dunlop,” son of the rich Sir John, a wealthier man than he could ever be, devoting himself to her unequivocally, as Cuthbert thought—and Cuthbert in his heart devoutly believed that Rose’s gentle excellence needed only to be seen to win all love and honour. So he gravely asked himself whether it would be right for him, even if it were in his power, to stand in the way, and endeavour to secure for himself, who must struggle for years in the uphill road to success, one who would do honour to this higher rank which seemed about to be laid at her feet. And Cuthbert, with the self-denial of a man who magnanimously gives up, what he sees no hope of ever attaining, said to himself: No—no—*His* affection, strong and powerful as it was, should never stand in Rose’s way.

And this was no small trial to Cuthbert. He had come here prepared to say certain things which would have made one heart in Allenders leap. He had even gone so far as to confide his intention to his mother, and it was somewhat hard now to give it up, and go steadily back to his books and his struggles, relinquishing for ever the fairy solace of these disappointed hopes. It was hard, was it right? Cuthbert persuaded himself so, as he rode silently along those wintry lanes, where the snow lay thick under the hedges, and whitened every spray; but Cuthbert did not know how great a share in it belonged to the pride which lay at the bottom of his heart.

When he returned to Allenders, Rose was busy with Agnes in preparation for the party. He did not see her, and this brought confirmation to his previous thoughts. Then came the party itself, an ordinary collection of well-looking, well-dressed people, among whom Cuthbert, with his preoccupied thoughts, found very little to interest him. Miss Dunlop, it is true, a well-bred, trained, mature young lady, acquainted with the world, made herself very polite and agreeable, and evidently regarded Cuthbert as one of the most tolerable persons present; but then Mr. Dunlop was at Rose’s side again, and Rose looked shy and pale, and embarrassed, shrinking from the glance

and touch of her new attendant as an indifferent person never could do. Cuthbert turned away with a great sigh when he perceived her face flush and grow pale, her hand tremble, her eyes cast down. He thought it was the stranger beside her whose presence called forth these unwilling evidences of maidenly tremor and confusion ; and he turned away, feeling as if some burning hand had clutched at his heart.

But Cuthbert could not see the wistful glances, which, when he painfully averted his eyes, dwelt upon him with inquiring sadness ; and when he looked again, Rose was sitting silent as before, with sudden flushes on her face, and sudden tremors in her frame, answering, it is true, with few words and a little melancholy smile, when any one addressed her, but entirely failing to make the impression which Harry had predicted for her pink silk gown. And there was Mr. Dunlop paying his devoirs gallantly ; those easy assiduities of word and manner ! —Cuthbert felt the strong love sicken his own heart, as he said to himself that these had charmed the trustful spirit of his Lady Rose.

And Mr. Dunlop, observing the changes of her face, at first with a little amusement, very soon came to the same conclusion too, and was embarrassed and annoyed, gratified and proud. For nothing was further from the thoughts of the baronet's son, for whom the magnanimous Cuthbert was willing to sacrifice himself, than any particular admiration of Rose, or the faintest intention of offering himself to the sister of Harry Muir. But the young man was human, and not insensible to ladies' love. He thought, like Cuthbert, that his attractions had overpowered Rose, and his tone insensibly grew tender, and his attentions marked, till Rose, able to bear it no longer, stole away.

"Poor Rose Allenders," said Miss Dunlop to Cuthbert, as Rose left the room. "She seems to think John is in love with her ; she is a very nice little girl, I think, but some young ladies are so ridiculous, taking every little attention so seriously, and I really must speak to John."

But Cuthbert, if she knew it, could have thrown John out of the window with far greater pleasure than he handed John's sister to the new piano ; and immediately after he sat down for a full hour to watch the door, with so much earnestness and solicitude in his face, that Rose, when she stole in again, brightened as a with a sudden sunshine. And Cuthbert's heart lightened a little too ; but still it was full of dis-

trust and doubt, and he never drew near her to speak the words, or hear the response, which might have set this doubt at rest.

The night was over, and nothing but the most ordinary civilities had passed between them; next morning he was to go away. He stood on the threshold in his rough travelling coat and plaid, saying, "Good bye," with a voice which slightly faltered. He had shaken hands with Rose in the dining-room, where they breakfasted, and now he thought he was taking farewell of Allenders. But as he looked back between Martha and Agnes, who had come with him to the door, Cuthbert saw a shy, lingering figure in the doorway of the room he had left. His heart warmed; he stepped back to take Rose's hand again, and press it kindly in another farewell. They said nothing except "Good bye;" but Cuthbert caught one timid, upward glance, and Rose saw the full steady look which conveyed to her so much of what the heart meant to say. The cloud rose from her heart and floated away; in another moment Cuthbert was gone, and she sat down to her work in intense silence, eager to resume her dreams; but Cuthbert rolled away on the frosty road, and looked back on Allenders, with a sadness at his heart.

He had hitherto unconsciously assumed to himself the right of assistance and succour if any emergency should come. Now he felt this gliding away from him—now he could no longer dream of carrying this Rose in his arms to the safe place where rains of adversity might beat upon the gentle heart no more. The future of which he had speculated so much, grew misty and uncertain to Cuthbert. The little cloud of breath before him, hovering in the frosty air, rose up like a white mist upon distant Benledi, and obscured him, though he looked out from among the clouds; and so over many a great event, and many a weighty hour, this little present mist rose dim and disheartening, and Cuthbert could not look beyond it—could not in his blended pride, and eagerness, and anxiety, distinguish the simple truth under this momentary veil.

But Harry by his side, spoke of his projects, and Cuthbert seemed to listen, and gave answers not so far astray, though Cuthbert's thoughts were little employed about Harry's improvements, and it cost him an effort to keep up his attention. They parted very cordially, however, and Harry urged upon his friend repeated invitations to return, which Cuthbert was fain to evade. He remembered Rose's parting glance, and

could not prevail upon himself to resign the chance of going back; but again he thought of the previous day, the previous night, and sighed to himself heavily as he turned his face towards home. He thought he had looked his last upon Rose.

When Harry left Cuthbert, he went to his bankers and drew a very considerable sum from his "capital;" but Harry felt he had been very economical lately, and could afford a little indulgence now; so he ordered some pretty bits of jewellery which he had fancied Agnes wanted last night, and called on Gilbert Allenders and some other choice spirits, and dined with them at the principal inn, and spent the evening merrily; nor was it until John had made repeated representations of the darkness of the night, and the necessity for getting home, that Harry suffered himself to be persuaded, and bid a reluctant good-night to his friends.

Charteris was bending over a mass of papers, schooling the heart which still throbbed so loudly, and wearying himself out with indifferent business, that his disappointment might not sit too near the source of his strength, when Harry, wearied by quite a different process, drove past the dark and silent houses at Maidlin Cross. The labourers there were lying down to the untroubled slumber purchased by a toilsome day; and the children were asleep in Allenders, and Martha was standing by the window of her own room, looking out into a darkness so profound, that it made her blind, and feeling a darkness profounder still within the heart, which she coerced into absolute silence; when, drowsy and wearied out, dazzled with the lights, and annoyed by the quietness, Harry came home.



CHAPTER XXXV.

He will hang upon him like a disease.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

"I've a great mind to practice out here, Harry," said Gilbert Allenders; "lots of scarlet-fever, and measles, and whooping-cough to start a man. And I want to be decent and respectable, and get out of temptation. If you were in an interesting position, like me, I'd get you a couple of rooms at Allender

Mains, and invite you to dinner every day, till you were set up. Interesting children of Maidlin, you don't know how much you want a doctor!"

"And would you actually come out here in winter, Gilbert?" said Harry. "You don't know how dull it is sometimes."

Harry drew his hat over his eyes, and returned very gruffly the passing salutation of Geordie Paxton. It was now a week since he had visited his fields, and that was more than time to make Harry sick—as he said—of the whole concern.

"The duties of my profession, Sir," said Gilbert, solemnly: "a medical man is always a martyr to the public and his duty—always. By the way, Harry, what would you say to take a run up to town for a week or two, just before settling down? I think it would do me good."

And Mr. Gilbert laid his hand on his heart, and sighed, as if he were the most interesting invalid in the world.

"To town? Do you mean to Stirling? I am there often enough already," said Harry.

"Stirling!" Mr. Gilbert put up his hand to arrange the great woollen cravat he wore, and laughed hoarsely. "You don't fancy I call that little hole of a place, town! How innocent you are, after all!"

"Am I?" Harry felt himself growing very angry, and kicking away a stone which happened to lie beside his foot, sent it spinning through a group of Maidlin boys, dispersing themselves and their "bools" in all directions. If it had only broken Gilbert Allenders' shins instead, it would have pleased Harry better; but even this was a satisfaction.

"Very well aimed," said Gilbert, approvingly. "What I mean is, London—town—there is but one 'town' in the world. Come up with me, Harry, and I'll help you to enjoy yourself. Come."

"Help me to enjoy myself, will you?" said Harry, scornfully. Harry was more impatient of his companion to-day, than he had been for a long time.

"Come, come, we're old companions now," said Gilbert; "and I know you wouldn't dislike going to London: a man of your years and station, who has never been in London, is something quite unparalleled! The country should subscribe for a glass-case, and show you in it as a real old country-gentleman, who has never been in town all his life, and never means to go!"

"There is such a thing as going too far," said Harry, haughtily.

"Who was it said that, the first night I saw you—" said the malicious Gilbert; "don't you remember? But I won't aggravate you, Harry; and you needn't look as if you could eat me. Come, will you go?"

"I don't care for seeing London. What is it to me?" said Harry, with dignity: "just half-a-dozen big towns compounded into one! What should send everybody to London? At the same time, perhaps I may go: it's just as well going there, as staying at home here, doing nothing. And there is really nothing to be done on the land just now, in such a frost."

"You have been quite a hero, Harry!" said Gilbert; "few men, I can tell you, could have done what you have done. You ought to give yourself a little rest. Such a thing as this, now," said Gilbert, pointing to a line of carts slowly proceeding, with much ringing of horses' hoofs and carters' clogs, along the frosty, whitened road, "just to stand and let those odorous carts pass by might upset a man of your organization: yet you've been among them constantly for some two months, now. I envy you your force of resolution, Harry."

Poor Harry! this piece of flattery mollified his irritated temper more easily than anything else could have done. Half conscious that he had already abandoned this last and most costly toy of his, it salved his conscience to have his perseverance wondered at. He put his arm in Gilbert's, with sudden friendliness.

"I think I shall go, after all," he said. "Armstrong can manage everything well enough. He has been accustomed to this sort of thing all his life; and, to tell the truth, it requires that, I am afraid, to make a farmer—that is to say, your thorough enthusiastic farmer. But now that January is over, I think a few weeks' change would quite set me up again: besides, spring always reconciles one to the country. So I fancy we may settle upon going, Gilbert. When shall you be ready?"

"In a day—any time," said Mr. Gilbert, shaking the thin, powdery snow from the hedge, by a blow of his cane. "I haven't three ladies to look after me, as you have: the girls have their own affairs to mind, and so has the mamma. I get my wardrobe to superintend myself—different from you, Harry."

And not quite sure whether to be pleased, and accept this as a token of his superior importance, or to resent it as a check upon his manliness and independence, Harry began immediately to discuss the projected journey—how they should go, and when; and it was soon decided, very much more to Gilbert's satisfaction, than to the good pleasure of Agnes and Martha, at home.

For Agnes found out many little objections, and urged them with some pique and displeasure. Agnes thought she herself, his wife, would have been a much more suitable companion for Harry than Gilbert Allenders; and she should have greatly liked to go to London, even at risk of leaving the baby. Martha said nothing: her hope was gliding out of her hands again, defying all her eager attempts to hold it; and steady darkness—darkness as of the Egyptian night, tangible and positive, was settling down upon Martha's heart.

"So you have had our Edinburgh friend here again, Miss Rose?" said Mr. Gilbert. "I suppose he will condescend to be civil to you. What is the man, Harry? Nothing but a Scotch W. S., I suppose?"

"He is an advocate, and a gentleman," said Rose, under her breath; and when she had said this, she turned to the window, fearful of disclosing the vivid blush, which covered her whole face.

"When I called on him with Harry in July—I would not say, in presence of ladies, what my impulse was," said Gilbert, lifting his large bony hand, and displaying his ringed finger in relief against the black brushwood about his chin. "He looked at me with a malice which disgusted me. I suppose he thought I was in his way," added Mr. Gilbert, complacently, bestowing upon Rose, who had just turned her head, roused and defiant, a most emphatic look of admiration.

And Harry laughed: Rose turned her eyes to him slowly, and felt her heart burn—that Harry should think so meanly of her as to fancy Gilbert Allenders could stand in Cuthbert's way!

"But when Mr. Charteris looks at you, Rosie," whispered Violet, "his lip aye moves, and the lid comes over the eye. Last time, he looked as if he could greet: what was that for, Rose?"

But Rose made no reply.

There were, as Gilbert prophesied, great preparations in Allenders for Harry's departure, and various purchases made,

that Harry's appearance away from home might be worthy the station which his little wife thought so exalted. None of them were quite prepared for the total insignificance which always falls upon a solitary visitor to London; and when Gilbert, putting up his own little carpet-bag, took occasion to remark, sneeringly, upon the great, new, shining portmanteau which Harry carried, neither himself nor Agnes, who had come to Stirling to see him away, were angry. They said, "Poor Gilbert!" in a sympathetic look, and compassionated him, who had neither rank to maintain, nor a little wife to help him to maintain it; and when Agnes, as she went away, casting wistful looks behind her at Harry, caught a glimpse of Gilbert's great, sallow, unwholesome face, surmounted by its little travelling-cap, and encircled by its coarse, wiry hair, she could almost have been bold enough to turn back, and follow Harry. She contrasted them in her mind a hundred times, during her melancholy drive home, and had many a dreary thought about temptation, and evil company, and Harry "led away."

Poor Harry! he was always "led away;" for not one of his anxious watchers could prevail with herself to speak of his errors in harder words than these.

As Agnes returned home, she called at Blaelodge to take up the children; for their holidays were over, and they had returned to school; and a little cluster of other children, also returning from school, hung on behind the carriage, and kept up a little quick tramp of feet behind, tempting John now and then to wave his whip good-humouredly over their heads, and warn them that he would "come down the next time." But John, who came from Maidlin Cross himself, never came down; and Violet and Katie, peering out of the window on either side, nodded to the heads of their respective factions, and whispered to each other, who was at school, and who was "gathering stanes," as they passed band after band—some with books and slates, some girded with their great work-aprons, returning from the field.

From the open doors at Maidlin Cross, the pleasant fire-light shines out upon the road, reddening its sprinkled snow; and figures stand in the doorways, dark against the cheery light within; and voices ring, clear and sharp, through the air. The carriage, now deserted by its band of attendants, begins to grow rather dreary as it advances into the darkness, and Agnes does not speak, and Katie and Violet cannot see each other's faces; but they are quite cheered and revived, so long

as they can hear the far-off sound of those voices at Maidlin Cross.

And by the fireside Martha and Rose sit very silently. A faint sound comes from the river, and the wind whistles shrill among the leafless trees; but except these, and now and then an occasional noise from the kitchen, where Dragon has been summoned in to sit with Mysie and her companion, that there may be "a man in the house," there is perfect stillness within and without. They are both working—you would think they never do any thing but work—and both are absorbed and lost in their own thoughts. When at rare intervals they speak, it is to wonder how far Harry will be by this time, and what he will see in London, and when he will return; but they do not say to each other that they tremble for Harry, nor tell what distinct remembrances arise before them both, of the sad scenes of the past; yet now and then a sudden start, and quick look around this cheerful room, discover to you that they have forgotten where they are for the moment, and that the dim walls of Mrs. Rodger's parlour, the proper background of many a recalled grief, are more clearly present before them, than this brighter and more prosperous place.

Yet they are cheered, in spite of themselves, when Agnes and her little companions come in, dazzled, out of the darkness; and Lettie volunteers a confession of some fear as they came along that dark road, close to the Lady's Well. Silence is not congenial to Agnes, and the baby cries loudly in the nursery; and little Harry, very sleepy, rouses himself up to devour cakes, and swallow as much tea as is permitted. So the night passes away; but a hundred times they fancy they hear Harry's summons at the outer-door; and almost believe, with a thrill between hope and fear, that he has come home.

The days pass, and grow into weeks, and still they sit all the long evening through, and again and again fancy they hear the sound of his return, and hold their breath in eager listening. A few letters, containing long lists of things he has seen, come to them tardily; but they never think of Harry, in his extreme occupation, carrying these letters about with him for a day or two, before he recollects to send them away. The farm-manager comes now and then, anxious to see Allenders; for now the frost has broken up, and a genial dry season has succeeded it, and the cautious Armstrong is slow to do anything without his employer's approval. Some fertile, well-cultivated land, for a lease of which Harry was bargaining with

Sir John Dunlop's factor, as a profitable addition to his own farm, has been secured by another applicant during Harry's absence ; and the mason who contracted for Harry's new byres and stables, after a long delay by the frost, now refuses to go on, till he has received one of the payments to which he is entitled. But no answer comes to the letters in which these matters are spoken of—his short notes only speak of sights and constant occupation, and he never says when he is to return.

The cold, mild, early February comes in quietly ; and the nightly rains patter upon the trees, and swell the burn to hoarseness, and splash in the swollen river. In the morning, when the feeble sunshine falls dimly upon the lawn, and its flower borders, Violet and Katie rejoice over, here and there, a golden or purple crocus, and eagerly point out the buds swelling on the trees ; but at night it is always rain, striking on the bare branches, and filling the whole air with a sound of mysterious footsteps passing to and fro around the lonely house. And within the house they all grow very still—they all listen for Harry's step, for Harry's call ; and their hearts tremble, and their frames shiver, as every night they think he will return.

But February is nearly past, and a March gale, impatient of the slow progress of the year, has sprung up among the hills before his time, and rends the clouds over Demeyet, tossing them scornfully to the east and to the west, when at last they hear Harry come home. And he does not come unexpectedly ; but has written before, stating day and hour, which he religiously keeps. His dress is worn, and out of order ; his shining new portmanteau frayed and dim, some articles of its contents lost, and almost all injured ; but he says nothing of excuse or apology for his long delay, and is fretted and irritated only when he hears of its results, liberally blaming everybody concerned. However, by and by, everything goes on again—goes on after a fashion, languidly, and without success ; for Harry no longer cares about his fields.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

. . . . Let them go,
To ear the land that hath some hope to grow,
For I have none.

KING RICHARD II.

It is the seed time—the time of hope. The lawn at Allenders is traced with an outline of living gold, crocuses clustering up like children out of the fresh awakened soil; and day by day the brown husks swell upon the trees, and the fields add pile by pile to their velvet mantle. Your heart leaps when you stand in the morning sunshine, and hear the burn call to the river, and the river, with its happy voice pass on to the great sea. And all along this highway through which the children pass to school, the hedges put out timid leaves, venturing upon the chill, which in the morning brightness bid their lingering neighbours courage; and down among the long dewy grass, you can find here and there an early primrose, half timid, half triumphant, holding up its delicate chalice to receive the dew of heaven. The cows are marching gravely to their sweet pastures, the little “herds” straying after them, with all the winter’s “schulin” over, perchance to be dreamt upon through these meditative silent days, perchance to spring up in songs, like the natural voices of the springs that run among the hills, perchance to be merrily forgotten; but cheerful voices ring about the land, and tender sunshine glistens on Demayet, and an odour and fragrance of sweet Hope, makes the wide atmosphere blessed. Sweet Hope! inheritance and portion of human hearts, which God gives not his very angels, but only unto us.

Ah, Hope—good Hope—God’s tenderest angel!—coming back with the morning light to hearts which believed in the darkness, that thou wert gone for ever!—opening all doors, however barred, and when one hides his face from thee, touching him with wonderful touches, earnest and wistful, so that he cannot choose but look in thy sweet face again. Not always bright, not always gently pensive—desperate sometimes, and fearful to look upon, seeing nought before thee but a possibility; and sometimes looking down, solemn and grave, upon places which thou hast been constrained to leave, and

whence faces of agony gaze up to thee, clutching at the skirts of thy garments, hoping against Hope!

The year passed on, the flowers blossomed, the early trees began to shake out their leaves about the house of Allenders—the odour of primroses came in at the door, the voices of children made the walls ring, and youth was with them all, to beguile them into careless faith; but Hope, hooded and veiled as for a journey, and dwelling no longer with them in their chambers, stood on the threshold ready to depart. Again and again the dim face turned, as if to stay, reluctant and loth to loose her garments from their eager hands; but she never entered freely to dwell with them again.

The works went on with intermitting energy: now altogether neglected, now forced forward with spasmodic exertions. The labourers at Maidlin grew pinched and care-worn, exposed to a capricious authority, which sometimes left them idle for a week or two, and then poured upon their hands arrears of labour, which it was now too late to accomplish well. The wives murmured and recalled the steady “wage” which the old farmer gave; the men lounged round the Cross, and shook their heads, and prophesied ruin; the little shop newly opened, languished, and its keeper vainly lamented the folly which brought him to Maidlin. Sober agriculturists looking on, not without a quiet satisfaction in the truth of their own predictions, settled into their old quietness with a word of pity for Harry—poor Harry! His new farm buildings, built at great cost, stood empty and useless; his farm-manager, too, cautious to proceed by himself, wandered about whole days to consult Allenders, and when he could not find him, or found him indisposed to enter upon necessary business, went home in irritation and disgust—went home to find Gilbert Allenders established in his respectable house, corrupting his young son and offending his daughters; and Armstrong, like the labourers, shook his head, and sighed a heavy sigh for poor Harry.

Within the house of Allenders they were all very silent. Martha, making no comment upon Harry's life, tried to blind her eyes, and take out of them the vigilant jealous love which would not be deluded. Poor little Agnes, dispirited and pale, went about the house with her baby, forgetting all her girlish songs and laughter. Rose, wearying and sickened of the dreams which had been her sole solace, worked on in silence, and never cared to stir abroad; and merry little Katie Calder,

the only free heart among them, could not comprehend the vague gloom which so often overpowered Lettie—for Lettie's dreary thoughts had returned to her again.

"Lettie, dinnac be sae dull," pleaded Katie Calder; "naeboddy ever sings or says a word now—naeboddy but Allenders, and the doctor, when he comes; but I dinna like the doctor, Violet, and they canna bide him at Maidlin Cross."

"I think he's a bad man," said Violet, decidedly—and she clenched her hand, and stamped her little foot upon Dragon's stair.

"Ay, bairns," said Dragon; "and I would like to hear somebody explain in a sensible way what gies him such a grip o' Mr. Hairy. You'll no ken, Missie; you're ower wee; but if there was the like of Boston, or the young lad Livingstone, that converted sae mony hunder folk on the Monday of the preachings at the kirk of Shotts, or John Welsh, that wore the very stanes with his praying, to the fore now, I wouldna care to take my fit in my hand and gang away to ask their counsel: for, ye see, Mr. Hairy's a different man from yon—a very different kind o' man—and how the like of this chield has gotten such maistry over him is a miracle to me. I kent within mysel it was an ill sign when they ca'd him Hairy. There's ne'er been a Hairy Allenders from Leddy Violet's time till now."

Lettie would not speak of family concerns even to Dragon. She had already the instinctive pride which hides the wound in its own breast, and dies rather than complain; so she changed the subject rapidly.

"Dragon, you never told us the story about the laird that planted the oak; and I thought myself, when I was at the waterside, that I heard it groan; but how could it groan, Dragon, at the season the man was killed? How could it ken the seasons, and it only a tree?"

"It's just because ye have nae knowledge, Missie," said Dragon. "There's me mysel noo, an auld man. I'm aye cauld, and aye creeping to my bit spunk of fire—ye might say how should I ken the seasons; but the oak has its fit constant in the earth, and its head to the sky, and hears the water every day, and feels the rain and the sun, and kens when to put forth its first leaves, and when to let them fa', better than the wisest man that ever lived upon this earth. And weel may it groan, the auld oak—it's langer in the service of the family than me; and do you ye think I dinna groan mony a time, to see a fine lad like Mr. Hairy led away?"

"Dragon, he's my Harry!" cried little Violet, in a sudden passion, stamping her foot again violently on the stones, while the tears fell down her cheeks, and quivering lip and dilating nostril bore witness to the force of her feelings. "He's our Harry—he's my Harry, Dragon! and I wish God would take me—oh, I wish God would put me in a grave, my lane, and kill me, if He would keep Harry well!"

And the tears poured down over Violet's cheeks, and she dashed her hand into the air, and cried aloud.

Poor little Lettie! many an elder, many a wiser, never a more loving heart has lost itself in such another agony, chafing against that inscrutable providential will, which we call fate.

Katie Calder looked on with wonder and dismay. Honest little Katie could not comprehend what this strange emotion was; but with *her* natural instinct she made instant endeavours to "divert" her little friend. And Dragon looked at Violet with his wandering light blue eyes, like a man half awakened from a dream; but as the child's highly-wrought feelings subsided, and she sat down on the steps and wept, he fell back into his old torpor. You could almost have thought that this strange voice of passion in the child had rung back through the waste of years, and lighted upon the man's heart which lay sleeping in Adam Comrie's breast.

Eh, Lettie, Willie Paterson's broken his leg," said Katie Calder. "It was on the big slide between Mrs. Cogan's and Maidlin, and a' the boys play at his mother's window now, to let him hear them when he's lying in his bed. It was little Johnnie Paxton that told me, Dragon, when he came to the kitchen to see Mysie.

"Willie Paterson's a fine laddie of himsel," said Dragon, "and has a great notion of you, Missie; but mind, he's only a puir widow's son, and besides he's gotten in among some muckle ill callants, and they're leading him away."

"Dragon," said Lettie gravely, "when folks are led away, are they not doing ill themselves? Is it a' the blame of the one that leads them away, and no their ain, Dragon?"

"Weeld, I'll just tell ye a story, Missie," said the old man. "When I was a young lad, I had ance a brother, and he was easy beguiled. So a sodger out of the town got him, and courted at him, and garred him drink, and led him into every kind of evil, till the poor callant lost his employ, and listed, and ga'ed away across the sea to the war. By a' accounts he

was little steadier when he was away, than he had been at hame, though he had a guid heart for a' that, and was aye kind to his friends; and at the end of the war he came back just as simple as ever he was, with a sma' pension, and as many wounds as might have served a regiment. He wasna weel hame when up turned this deevil of a sodger again—where the tane was, ye were sure to find the tither—and within a year, George Comrie was dead and buried. Now ye've baith guid judgments to be bairns—wha was't that should bear the blame?"

"It was the sodger, Dragon," said Katie Calder, with instant determination.

Violet said nothing. She was pulling away the withered fibres of ivy from Dragon's wall.

"I think folk shouldna be led away," said Lettie slowly, after a considerable pause; "and you never say folk are led away when they do *good* things, Dragon. I think it was *his* blame too, as well as the other man's."

"He's in his grave this forty year," said Dragon, "but I mind him better than I mind his nameson, Geordie Paxton, that I saw only yestreen. Maybe I should have ga'en sooner to my account mysel, and wan beside a' my ain friends; but for a' I'm sae auld, bairns, I never crave to be away; and mony a young head I've seen laid in the mools, since my ain was as white as it is this day. No that I am bragging o' that, Missie—but I'm auld, and I never feel ony dinnles noo. I think my heart has slippit down some gate, where trouble can never get a rug at it; and I'm aye pleased with the light and the guid day, and wi' a book whiles, and a crack, and my meat regular, and naething to fash me; and I see nae reason I have for deeing, though I *am* an auld man."

Strange, broken gleams shone out of Dragon's wandering eyes as he spoke, nodding his head feebly with a half-palsied motion—fitful glances, out of his torpor, of the heart and spirit which long ago made him a man; but the soul dwelt benumbed in its wintry habitation, like some forlorn dweller among the hills whose hut the snow has buried—and resigned itself to the slumbrous spell without strength to struggle into consciousness of anything higher than the warmth and ease in which it lay.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

I have heard when one lay dying, after long
And steadfast contemplation of sure death,
That sudden there would spring delicious hope,
And boastful confidence of health restored,
Into the heart that had not threescore throbs
Of its worn pulse to spend—
There is a madness that besets the verge
Of full destruction—madness that bath wild dreams
Of victory and triumph.

“How’s the farm getting on, Harry? Armstrong doesn’t seem very jubilant about it. What’s to become of the land?” said Gilbert Allenders.

They were sitting in the little round turret-room, looking out from the open door upon the lands of Allenders, and many a fair acre besides. A dewy May evening was shedding sweetness and peace over it all, and through the whole wide country before them the setting sun found out, here and there, a running water, and made all the hills aware of it with a triumphant gleam. Green corn rustling in the breeze, and gardens gay with blossoms, with here and there a red field of new ploughed earth, or a rich luxuriant strip of meadow to diversify them, spread round on every side; and the hum of animate life, the indistinct farmyard voice, the din of playing children, came to them dreamily, upon air which told you in loving whispers, of the hawthorn trees in those deep lanes below.

In Harry’s eye shines an unusual gaiety; and the confidence which sometimes deserts him, leaving him in such morose and sullen melancholy, has returned to-day. Not all natural is this renewal; for excitement, which makes Martha crush her hands together, and sends Agnes away secretly to weep, animates him with its passing gleam; but still he has command of himself, and is above Gilbert’s sneers.

“What’s to become of the land? It will do famously, of course!” said Harry; “and it’s only Armstrong’s caution that makes him quiet about it. If Fairly remains in the market for a year or two, I think I will buy it, Gilbert. They say it once belonged to the estate of Allenders, and Hoolie too, which is now Sir John’s. I should like to bring the land up to what it was in the old times; and I say, Gibbie, man,

you shall have a house, a regular red pill-box, with just such a surgery as will suit you; and settle down, and have an appointment at once, to doctor all my tenants. I should have quite a band of retainers if Fairly were added to Allenders."

"It's very well *you* got the estate, Harry," said Gilbert, with a sneer, which poor Harry could not see. "If it had fallen into our hands, it might have remained as it was, till the end of time, and neither been improved nor increased. Thank you for the pill-box, Harry; I always knew you were a warm friend. I'll depend on getting it, I promise you."

"And so you shall, Gilbert," said Harry; "but I'm not quite prepared to buy Fairly now. I've ordered home a great stock of fine cattle. I don't know if we'll have room for them all; plough horses—magnificent fellows!—and the finest cows that ever were seen in the respectable Carse of Stirling; but they take a lot of money, all these things; and I should be very glad to have the harvest over."

"The harvest? But this first year, I suppose, you don't expect very much from it?" said Gilbert.

"Don't I? Well, we'll see," said Harry, laughing; "but I must be economical this year, Gilbert—going on at this rate won't do. I've spent a small fortune this year; to be sure, it was on the land," said Harry, musing; "cattle, stables, byres, Armstrong and all his labourers, not to speak of the plough graith, and the harrows, and the threshing-machine, and all the things they have bothered me about; but we must be thrifty this year."

"I believe you've no memorandum of the money you lent me. I must make out one for you to-night, Harry," said Gilbert, carelessly. "Do you know how much it is?"

"Not I," said the lofty Harry; "nor do I care to know. Never mind memorandums—we know each other too well for that."

And Harry, whose capital had shrunk to the final thousand, and whose last expensive purchase remained to be paid for, led the way down stairs in high glee, feeling himself already the second founder of the family, and rich in patriarchal wealth. At the gate, Agnes and Rose were looking out eagerly along the road, from which a tramp of hoofs penetrated into the very drawing-room of Allenders. Little Katie Calder stood upon the summit of the low wall, with one foot on a tree, and Martha a little behind them, looked out with much gravity and concern.

Great work-horses, with ribbons at their ears, and elaborate decorated tails, were marching with heavy hoofs into Harry's stables; and the lowing of Harry's kine from the fields summoned the new milkmaids to lead them home. You would have thought it the most prosperous of homesteads, with its grey, thin house, and abrupt turret, telling of long descent and elder times; its superannuated Dragon witnessing to the family kindness which would not abandon an ancient servant; its great farm ranges, new and shining, which testified, or seemed to testify, to present energy and wealth; and its youthful family crowded about the gate, from pretty little matron Agnes to the meditative Lettie, standing by Dragon's side in the road without. Prosperous, peaceful, full of natural joys and pleasant progress; but Harry's flushed, excited face, and the coarse pretension of Gilbert Allenders came in strangely to break the charm.

"Come along, Agnes, and see them," said Harry, loudly. "I told you they were splendid fellows, Gilbert. Come, never mind your bonnet; and Gilbert will give you his arm, Rosie—come along."

"Wait till I get a shawl on—for the servants, Harry," said Agnes, freeing herself from his grasp.

"What about the servants? it's only at your own door," said Harry, securing her arm in his own; "and the light shines in your hair, Agnes, very prettily. Come away, little wife."

And Harry went on singing—

"There's gowd in your garters, Marion,
And siller on your white hause bane,"

to the secret misery of Lettie, who thought he was humiliating himself, and to the great wonder and astonishment of Katie Calder.

But Rose drew firmly back, and would not go. Rose was very near hating Gilbert Allenders; so he went to the other side of Agnes, and they walked to the stables together—poor little Agnes, nearly choking all the way with wounded pride, and shame, and fear, lest Harry might be offended in spite of her compliance.

"Why has Lady Dunlop never called on you again? and what has become of that pedantic son of hers?" said Harry, when they had returned, and were taking the tea which Agnes

hoped would subdue him. "It's three or four months now since you called on them, Agnes—why does not her ladyship return your visit? and I should just like to know what's become of young Dunlop."

"Hush, Harry!—I don't know—I can't tell," said Agnes, very humbly. "Young Mr. Dunlop has never been here since that time—you mind, Martha—after Harry came back from London."

"And why doesn't the fellow come again?" said Harry. "A pretty man he is, to think we're to keep on good terms with him, when he never does anything to keep it up himself. And what's become of these Nettlehaugh people, and Haigh of Foggo Barns? I suppose it's your fault, Agnes; you've been neglecting the proper forms—you've never called on them, I suppose?"

"Yes, Harry," said again the very low, timid voice of Agnes, "you have forgotten—you went with me once to both Foggo and Nettlehaugh, and Martha and I went another time, and they have never called since."

"I should like to know what they mean," said Harry loudly, his face flushing to a deep crimson. "I suppose they think we're not so good as them. Never mind, Agnes; never mind, my little wife—you'll be a richer woman yet, and see your son a greater man than any half-dozen of these little lairdies. I'll have all the work, you know, and I'll take it gladly; but little Harry shall be heir to better land than young Dunlop will ever see. A set of nobodies setting up for something. I should like to know what they mean."

"They were very kind at first," murmured Agnes, scarcely able to restrain the tears with which her eyes were weighed down.

"They were very kind at first," repeated Martha distinctly, as she rose to leave the room; "and to-morrow, when you are alone, Harry, I will tell you what they mean."

Never since she entered Allenders had Martha's voice had this tone before. Her brother started and turned to look after her, with something of the mingled look—defiance, reverence, respect and pain—which they all knew on his face long ago; but Martha was gone without another word. It had a singular effect on Harry. He sat down at the table, leaned his head upon his hand, and gazed with fixed eyes on the vacant space before him; but he scarcely spoke again that night.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief,
 Tho' thou repent; yet I have still the loss.
 The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
 To him that bears the strong offence's cross.

As a decrepit father takes delight
 To see his active child do deeds of youth,
 So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
 Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.

SHAKESPEARE—(SONNETS).

THE next morning Harry sat in sullen silence at the breakfast-table, scarcely raising his head. Agnes and Rose, with faltering, timid voices, never ceased addressing him. They pressed upon him the food which he could not taste, they asked his opinion with tearful eyes and a visible tremor on the most trifling matters, they laid caressing hands upon his shoulders when they passed behind his chair; but these affectionate acts were very visible. They could not conceal the suppressed excitement of their great anxiety, nor their consciousness that another crisis had come in Harry's fate.

And even little Lettie stirred on her chair restlessly, like a startled bird, and felt her heart leaping at her very throat, and scarcely could speak for her parched lips and the strong beating of this same little anxious heart. And no one knew what heavy throbs beat against Martha's breast—no longer fluttering and tremulous, but heavy as a death-knell. She said little, it is true, but still she addressed Harry sometimes as usual—as usual—perhaps with a tenderer tone—though Harry made no answer, save in monosyllables, to any of them all; and Martha very speedily rose from her place, and left the room.

Another spasmodic attempt at conversation was made by Agnes and Rose, but their own hearts beat so loudly in their ears, that they trembled for Harry hearing them. Poor Harry! through those long, slow moments which were hours to them, he hung idly over the table, trifling with his baby's coral—and it was not until all endeavours at speech had failed, and a total silence—a silence of the most intense and painful excitement to his companions—had fallen upon them, that rousing himself with an effort, and putting back the hair from his damp forehead, he slowly rose and went away.

Katie Calder, not understanding all this, and slightly depressed by it, had just stolen out of the room to gather up their books for school; so no one, save the wistful Lettie, was left with the young wife and Rose. They sat still for a short time in silence, eagerly listening to Harry's footsteps as he passed through the hall to his little library, and closed the door; and then Agnes clasped her hands upon her side, and gasped for breath, and said in a voice between a cry and a whisper:

"What will she say to him? Oh, what will Martha say to Harry, Rose?"

"I cannot tell—I cannot tell," said Rose, wringing her hands. "Oh, if it were only over! I could break my heart when I look at Harry—I could break my heart!" And Rose put her hands over her face in just such a passionate burst of restrained sobbing as had come upon Violet before.

After some time, they heard the slow footstep of Martha coming down the stairs, and both of them ran to the door to whisper an entreaty to her to "be gentle with Harry. Poor Harry!" They could scarcely say it for tears.

When Martha entered the library, Harry, lounging in the window-seat, was languidly turning a paper. He, poor Harry! was little less excited than they were, and heats and chills came over him, and his eye fell under Martha's mother eye; but the second nature which had risen like a cloud over that boy's heart which still moved within him, made him stubborn and defiant still. When she came in, he threw down his paper with a slight start, as of impatience; and turning to her, rapidly asked: "Well, Martha, what have you to say to me?"

"Am I to have liberty to say it, Harry?"

"What folly to ask me such a question," said Harry, angrily. "Does my sister need to make a formal affair of it, like this, when she has anything to say to me? Sit down, Martha, and don't look as if you came to school me; I may not be able to bear *that* very patiently, and I should be very sorry to hurt you. Sit down, and tell me what it is?"

Martha sat down with gathering coldness upon her face—coldness of the face alone, a mask to hide very different emotions.

"I come to-day while you are full master of yourself, and are alone," she said, with slow and deliberate emphasis—

Harry did not know that she compelled herself to speak so lest the burning tide of other words should pour forth against her will—"to answer a question you asked yesterday. You desired to know what your neighbours meant by ceasing to seek you; Harry, I wish to tell you what they mean."

Harry looked at her for a moment, as if about to speak, but rapidly turning away eyes which could not meet the steady gravity of hers, he took up his paper, and without looking at it, played with it in his hand.

"They mean," proceeded Martha, slowly, "that they do not choose to extend the courtesies of ordinary life to one who scorns and never seeks, the ordinary respect which is every man's right who lives without outward offence against God or man; they mean that they cannot pretend to honour what you have set yourself to disgrace; they mean that the name, the house, the family, which you can resign for the meanest of earthly pleasures, have no claim of special regard upon them. Your life is known in every peasant's house; they talk of you at the firesides of your labourers: they say, poor Allenders, and tell each other how you are led away—Harry! I ask you what right you have to be led away? You tell me you are not a child, and will not bear to be schooled by me. What right have you, a man—a man, Harry—to suffer any other man to lead you into evil? And this is what your neighbours mean."

Harry dashed the paper from him in sudden passion. "And what right have you—what right have you? Martha, I have borne much: what right have you to speak to me in such words as these?"

"God help me! the dearest right that ever mother had," exclaimed Martha, no longer slowly; "because my soul has travailed and agonized; because I put my hopes upon you, Harry—my hopes that were once shipwrecked, to be cast away again! Look at me, mind me all your life, boy, before you defy me! Night and day, sleeping and waking, I have carried you on my heart. When I was in my first youth, I cried with strong crying, and pangs such as you never knew, for power and wealth, and to win it with my hands. Who was it for, but you? Then I came to a dearer hope. I thought *you* would win it, Harry; and I would eat bread out of your hands, and exult in you, and call upon the heavens and the earth to see that you were mine. What of *my* hopes? They are ill to slay, but God has touched them, and they have died out of my

heart. *I have failed, and you have failed, and there is no more expectation under the sun. But I call you to witness you are mine—bought with the blood of my tears and my travail—my son, Harry—my son !*”

He did not answer, he did not look at her, but only covered his face with his hands.

“We are worsted, but we need not be destroyed,” continued Martha. “I accept the failure that is past, and acquiesce in it, because it has been God’s will—but God never wills that we should fail in the future, Harry. God be thanked that *it* lies continually before us, free of stain. And hope is hard to me—maybe it is because my tribulations have not wrought patience, that experience does not bring me hope. But I will hope again—I will make another venture ; and look for another harvest, Harry, if you will bid me ! Not like the last—God forbid that it should be like the last ! I will turn my face towards the needful conquest we have to make—you and me—and hope for *that*, though it is greater than taking a city. But Harry, Harry, I cannot bear to see you sinking—harder than it is to them, who are weeping for you yonder, it is to me who cannot shed a tear. Harry, am I to hope again ?”

But sad and terrible was the gleam in Martha’s dry strained eyes ; not like sunshine but like lightning, was the feverish hope for which she pleaded.

And Harry rose and took her hand, himself trembling with strong emotion. “From this day henceforth,” he vowed, with a choking voice, “never more, Martha, never more, can I forget myself, and them, and you.”

And there fell upon Martha a sudden relief of weeping, such as her eyes had not known for months. “You were once my boy, my bairn, Harry,” she said, with a strange hysteric smile, “I cannot forget that you were my bairn, my little brother—Harry—my hope !”

And Harry covered his face once more, and was not ashamed to weep.

Poor Harry ! for ever under the evil which had crusted his nature over, under all the pride, the jealousy, the self-assertion of conscious, remorseful, unrepentant sin, the boy’s heart, tender, fresh and hopeful, still dwelt in his breast. Only God can reconcile these strange contradictions ; but when you reached to it—and many a time had this added a pang to Martha’s sufferings—you could not choose but deem it an *innocent* heart.

By and by Martha left the room—left him there to meditate upon this and on the past. Poor Harry's heart lightened; in spite of himself, his attention wandered from these things of solemn weight and interest to little Harry playing under the walnut tree. Now and then, it is true, he put his hand over his eyes, and made his face grave, and mused, and even prayed; but anon his mind wandered again. The great excitement of the last hour sank into repose, and Harry had seldom been so easily amused with the little stumbles and misadventures of his child. At the other window, Agnes and Rose, unable to see anything, with their sick hearts and tearful eyes, sat in absorbed silence, looking out indeed, but without noticing even the favourite boy. Above, Martha was kneeling before God, in prayer which wrung not her heart only, but every fibre of her strained frame. Upon the sunny road without, little Lettie went silently to school, wiping a tear now and then from her cheek—all for Harry; while Harry sat in the window of his library, the cloud gone from his brow, and a smile upon his lip, watching his child at play—with simple pleasure and interest, as if he himself were a child.

And then he opened the window, and called to little Harry. With a sudden start, Agnes rose, and went out upon the lawn to read his face. His face was cloudless, smiling, full of quiet satisfaction and repose; and he had already begun to play with the child at the window. Agnes had only time to telegraph that all was well to Rose, when Harry called to her to get her bonnet and go out with him. With joy and relief she ran into the house to obey; and Harry met her at the library door, and said he wanted a little rest and relaxation to-day, and that she must persuade Martha and Rose to let him row them down the river in the neglected boat; and Agnes went up-stairs singing, and half weeping for joy.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Fair, through the lattice of yon cloud, the sun
Throws to us, half in stealth, his parting smile.
Night comes anon.

It was June weather now—warm and full, and a deep peace had fallen over Allenders. Harry, who was not naturally temperate in anything, was almost intemperate in his reformation now. He applied himself to business with devotion, had long consultations with Armstrong every morning, and repulsed coldly the usual familiarities of Gilbert Allenders. In his library, they always found the table covered with estimates and calculations, with expensive schemes for thrift, and elaborate economics of farming; while out of doors, Harry went blithely about his fields again, conciliating once more the half-alienated favour of his workmen, and regaining for himself the elastic vigour and health, which had begun to be shaken. Agnes sang to her baby all day long, till the very air within the house grew rich with ballad fragments. Rose, still a little weary in her heart, and longing secretly for a new beginning to her old dreams, began to interest herself in the pleasant pursuits of free young womanhood, and forgot the family care, as well as her own individual one. Martha sank back quietly into a temporary repose—was ill for a few days, and afterwards very quiet—for her frame had been shaken by severe exhaustion; very different from the natural good hope of common life, was the desperate stake for which she played; and when the moment, with all its pent-up and restrained excitement, was past, experience lifted its cold, prophetic voice again, and she could not choose but hear.

But the gossips at Maidlin Cross, glad to return to their kindlier opinion—for Harry's good looks, and naturally gracious manners, gave them a strong prepossession in his favour—congratulated each other that Allenders was steady now, and quite another man, and that "it bid to be" a great comfort to his sister and his wife—for they unconsciously put Martha before Agnes, doing reverence to the more absorbing love. And young Mr. Dunlop, seeing Harry's frank face brightened by renewed hope and wholesome pleasure, and hearing how sedulously he had begun to attend to all his con-

cerns, was smitten with remorse for his rudeness, and brought his mother in state to call on Mrs. Allenders, which her good-humoured ladyship would have done months ago but for his restraining. Prosperity and peace returned again, as it seemed; and Harry's last thousand was still very little diminished.

But it chanced that Cuthbert Charteris suddenly looked in upon the astonished household, on the very day of Lady Dunlop's call. Cuthbert did not know that this call had a value quite separate from their pleasure in itself, to the family at Allenders; and he thought the tremulous agitation of both Agnes and Rose originated in a cause very different from its real one. So Cuthbert was cold, constrained and unhappy; scarcely able to conceal his contempt of Mr. Dunlop, and resolutely declining to remain, even for a single night. They, in their turn, misunderstood him; they thought he had heard something unfavourable of Harry, and while they redoubled their attentions to himself, they overwhelmed him with references to Harry's goodness, and stories of the kindness with which all his labourers, and the little group of cottar wives at Maidlin, regarded Allenders. If Cuthbert had been sufficiently disengaged from his own engrossing concerns, these continual defences would have made him fear: as it was, he could think of nothing but the Rose, which had never seemed so fair in his eyes as now, when he convinced himself that another was about to bear it away.

Rose did not know what to think of Cuthbert. Had he been indifferent to her all along? But Rose, with a natural pride in many things, conjoined the most perfect and unconscious humility in her estimate of herself; that he should be jealous, never entered into her mind—it was far easier to believe that he had never “cared;” and Rose blushed even to acknowledge to herself that she once thought he “cared,” by doubting it now. Yet there was something in Cuthbert's eyes—something in the full, grave look she sometimes met, which filled Rose with a vague thrill of emotion; and when he was gone she remembered this, and ceased to comment upon the rest.

About a week after Cuthbert's call, Harry went to Stirling, taking Agnes with him. They were going on business—to draw money, of which Agnes claimed a considerable portion for her household expenses; and Harry himself, to the great content of all, had invited her to accompany him. They were quite at ease and quite at home, and with the children, who

rejoiced in a holiday, had taken a long ramble through woods and lanes in the afternoon, coming home laden with wild flowers. Even Martha, amused with Katie's radiant pleasure, and Violet's mingled reverie and mirth, had brightened quite insensibly, and Rose was as gay as the little girls themselves. They were all seated under the walnut tree on the lawn when Harry and Agnes returned, and not a shadow crossed any of them, except the ill-favoured one of Gilbert Allenders, as he came in at the gate, resolved to stay to dinner whether he was asked or no.

But the dinner past, and still Harry kept Gilbert steadily at a distance. They could not sufficiently admire his strength and resolution, and how bravely he resisted the tempter. Gilbert himself seemed slightly surprised and baffled; and not a single disconcerted glance was lost on the rejoicing Agnes, with whom there was only a single step between the greatest alarm for Harry's stability, and the greatest pride and confidence in it.

But when the evening was considerably advanced, and they had all assembled in the drawing-room, Harry began to talk of what they had seen and heard in Stirling.

"Who do you think I met, Martha?" said the unthinking Harry. "Dick Buchanan, my old plague in Glasgow; and what do you think he told me?—I scarcely can believe it—that our friend Charteris was actually going to be married to his sister Clemie, a good-natured clumsy girl, whom I used to see going to school. I could not have expected such a thing of Charteris."

And as Harry's eye rested on Rose, he stopped suddenly, his face flushing all over with the deepest colour; yet Rose displayed no motion. A slight start, a momentary paleness, and then she put out her hand as if to grasp at something, drawing it back by and bye with an unconscious motion of imagination, as if her prop had pained her—though she did not say a word.

But her head grew giddy, and the light swam in her darkening eyes; and constantly in her mind was this impulse to take hold of something to keep herself from falling. When Gilbert took reluctant leave, and she rose to bid him good-night, her hand clutched at the back of an empty chair; and when she went to rest, with a ringing in her ears and a dimness before her eyes, Rose held by the wall on her way to her own chamber—not to support herself, though even her form tottered, but to support her heart which tottered more.

She did not think, nor ask nor question anything ; she was too much occupied in this immediate necessity of holding herself up, and propping her stricken strength.

"I believe I am a fool," said Harry, suddenly, when Rose withdrew ; "I never thought—Charteris was here so short a time the other day, and it is so long since he came before—I never thought of Rose ; but she took it very quietly, Martha. Is she interested, do you think ? Will she feel it ? I am sure, for my own part, I always believed that Charteris liked Rose, and I cannot tell what made me so foolish to-night."

"Perhaps it was very well," said Martha ; "it must have been told, and the manner of telling it is a small matter ; but Rose, as you say, took it very quietly. I dare say she will not care about it, Harry."

Martha knew better—but she thought it well to pass over the new grief lightly, since it was a grief which could not bear either sympathy or consolation.

But when Lettie next morning, prompted by a sudden caprice, ran "all the way" to the Lady's Well, to gather some wild roses and the fragrant meadow-queen for Martha, she saw some one sitting on the stone where Lady Violet sat, and was only fortified by the bright daylight to approach. But it was Rose's muslin gown, and not the silvery garments of the fairy lady, which lay upon the turf ; and Rose was leaning with both her hands heavily upon the canopy of the well, and looking into the deep brushwood, as Lettie many a time had looked—though this was a deeper abstraction than even the long silent reveries of the poetic child. With a sudden consciousness that there lay some unknown sorrow here, the little girl came forward shyly, looking up with her wistful eyes in her sister's face. It did not seem that she interrupted Rose's thoughts, and Violet began silently to gather her flowers. There were some wild roses, half-opened buds, which could be carried even by a school girl, without risk of perishing, for one of the "young ladies" at Blaelodge, whom Lettie liked greatly, and who much desired some tangible memorial of the place whence the Lady Violet of Lettie's oft-repeated story passed away ; and a sweet fairy posie of the graceful queen of the meadow for Martha's especial gratification, and some drooping powdery flowers of grass, from which the seed was falling, for Lettie herself. When they were all gathered, Lettie sat down softly on the grass at Rose's feet, and laid the flowers in her lap, and was very quiet, venturing now and then a wistful glance up to the absorbing face above her.

And by and bye, the heavy leaning of Rose's arms relaxed, and she leaned upon her knee instead, and looked down on Violet. "Lettie, I think my heart will break," said Rose, with a low sigh; and again she put out her hand.

She could not say so much to Martha: she could not tell it to another in all the wide world, for the shy heart would render no reason for its sudden grief; but she could say it to her little sister, who asked no reason—who did not speak at all in vain consolation, but who only looked up, with such a world of innocent sympathy and wonder in her dark, wistful eyes.

Poor Rose! a hero and martyr to her own pride of womanliness, will never tell what this blight is—never, if it should kill her—and she thinks it will kill her, poor, simple heart! Since she heard "it"—and she never describes to herself more definitely what it was she heard—she has been in a maze, and never reasoned on it. She cannot reason on it—we so seldom *think*, after all, either in our joys or troubles—she only is aware of long trains of musings sweeping through her mind, like dreams, which place her in the strangest connection with Cuthbert and Cuthbert's bride, and bring them continually in her way; and she always assumes a sad dignity in her fancies, and will do anything rather than have them believe that this moves her; and then she tries to think of Harry and of the family cares and expectations, to rouse her from this stupor of her own; and getting sick with the struggle—sick alike in body and in heart—lays down her head upon her hands, and faintly weeps.

"Now, Lettie, come; they will wonder where we are," said Rose; and she dipped her hand in the little marble basin of the Lady's Well, and bathed her aching eyes. Lettie, with a visionary awe, bathed hers too, as if it were an act of worship; and was very sad, in the depths of her heart.

Rose was a bad dissembler. It was quite impossible to hide from any one of them that she was very melancholy; but Harry saw less of the truth than the rest, for Rose struggled valiantly to smile before Harry, and to keep all her gloom concealed. He was a man, even though he was her dearest brother. She would suffer anything before she would disclose her heart to him.

Agnes, troubled and perplexed, not knowing whether to take notice of Rose's sorrow or not, paid her all manner of little tender attentions, as if she had been ill. Martha, asking nothing—for Martha knew very well that Cuthbert had broken

no word, nor had ever definitely *said* to Rose anything which could give grounds for this sadness—talked to her sometimes of the common trials which common people bear and overcome; sometimes awoke her out of a reverie, with a kind hand upon her shoulder, and a quick word in her ear; employed her all day long at something; watched her perpetually with a mother's unwavering care; but little Lettie, looking wistfully up, with her dark, melancholy eyes—Lettie, who knew that Rose's heart was "like to break," and who deserted all her play to sit beside her on the carpet, and press close to her feet, and caress them softly with her hand—Lettie was perhaps the best comforter of all.

But meanwhile the unconscious Cuthbert wearied himself with continual business, and thought murderous thoughts of the innocent young Mr. Dunlop; till his mother, alarmed about his health, prevailed upon him, with many solicitations, to go away for a month, and travel, and rest. And Clemie Buchanan, more unconscious still, romped, to the full heart's content of a strong joyous girl of sixteen, among the Argyleshire hills, and reverencing greatly the lofty attainments of her cousin Cuthbert, would quite as soon have thought of marrying old Dr. Black, who christened her, and whose sermons she had laboriously listened to almost every Sabbath-day in all these sixteen years. Clemie had a sweetheart of her own—a young merchant like her brothers; and Cuthbert, as he travelled southwards, cast longing looks towards Stirling, and scarcely could deny himself another glance at Allenders; but looks do not travel over straths and rivers, and Rose never knew the affectionate longings, which could not prevail with themselves to relinquish her remembrance and her name.

CHAPTER XL.

What man is he that boasts of fleshly might,
And vaine assurance of mortality,
Which, all so soone as it doth come to flight
Against spirituall foes, yields by and by?

FAERY QUEEN.

THAT day, beginning with deep sadness to one member of the family, and with anxious sympathetic concern to the rest, was the last day of hope and peace in Allenders.

For on the very next—another June day, rich with the most glorious mockery of joy and sunshine—Martha's last desperate hope died in her heart. It had struggled long in its strange, feverish lifetime; now it fell at a blow.

A gracious invitation to Sir John Dunlop's had come that evening to Harry; and Harry spent the day with Gilbert Allenders in a ride to Stirling, from which he did not return, until the full time when Sir John would enter his stately dining-room. Agnes, dressed for a full hour, stood at the window trembling and miserable, looking for Harry; and Martha was on the turret; and Rose, roused out of her own trouble, wandered along the road with the children to meet him. But when Harry came, he came with glittering eye and ghastly smiles, as they used to see him, long ago, in Glasgow; and bidding Gilbert good-bye, with loud demonstrations of friendship, at the gate, came in in great haste, and ran up-stairs, taking three steps at a time, to get to his dressing-room, and make ready for Lady Dunlop's party. Agnes went after him timidly, to say it was too late, and to beg him not to go; but Harry laughed first, and then frowned, and then commanded—he was resolved to go, whatever was the hour.

"He is not fit to go, he will disgrace himself for ever, they will never speak to him again," sobbed the little wife. "Oh! Martha, speak to him, tell him it is too late."

Poor little Agnes! she could not believe that Martha's "speaking to him" would have no effect.

In half an hour, he came down stairs, dressed, and considerably subdued, though still with an excitement only too easily perceptible.

"Where's John with the carriage?" exclaimed Harry. "Why does that fellow always keep us waiting? why is he not at the door?" and he rang the bell violently.

"You are much too late, and they are punctilious people; I beg you will not go to-night. It is easy to send an apology," said Martha, who was calmer now than she had been through all her time of hope.

"It is this night and no other, that I intend to go," said Harry, "and I am not inclined to suffer any more dictation. What's the matter, Agnes? why do you make her cry, Martha? Must I take her away with red eyes, all for your pleasure? Tell John to bring round the carriage instantly—instantly, do you hear? he has kept his mistress waiting long enough already."

And as the maid withdrew, startled and astonished, Harry himself went to the door, and stood upon the threshold, waiting for John.

"You're not angry, Martha," pleaded poor little Agnes; "he does not know what he is saying. And never mind sitting up, it would only grieve you; I must try to take care of poor Harry myself to-night."

Martha made few demonstrations, but she put her arm round the little wife now, and kissed the cheek upon which the tears were still wet. This caress nearly overcame Agnes, but with a strong effort, she wiped her eyes, and went away.

Drearily passed that evening. A heavy shower came on as it darkened, and all the night through beat upon the leaves, so that Lettie, holding her breath as she learned her lessons, fancied that footsteps were travelling round and round the house—continually, without pause or intermission, round and round. And the wind whistled with a little, desolate, shrill cry, about the silent walls, and the burn ran fast and full into the river. Every sound without became distinctly audible in the extreme quietness, and other sounds which did not exist at all, stole in, imagined, upon their strained ears. Sounds of earriage-wheels, which never advanced, but always rumbled on at a distance, shrill cries of voices hovering in the air, footsteps upon the stair, footsteps without—it was a dreary night!

And when it became late, and it was full time for Harry's return, Martha stole down stairs to the lower room, and opened the window, and stood by it in the dark, watching for their carriage-wheels. The jasmine rustled on the walls, with an early star of white specking its dark luxuriance—alas! those jasmine flowers! Martha plucked this half-opened one hastily, and threw it away—she could not bear its fragrance.

And Rose crept after her, and sat upon a chair at the window, leaning her throbbing brow on Martha's arm. "Hush! I hear them," said Martha; it was nothing but this imagined sound which had rung through all the night.

At last they came, and though the sisters heard Harry's voice while yet the carriage was hidden in the darkness, he handed his wife out very quietly, when they came to the door. On their way up-stairs, Agnes felt her hand caught in Martha's, and answered the implied question, in a tremulous whisper: "No doubt they saw—no doubt they saw—and pity me, Martha, for such a night; but maybe, maybe, it was not so bad as we might have feared."

That night nothing more was either asked or told, and it was not till the forenoon of the next day, when Harry had gone out, that Agnes, leaning on Martha's arm, and with Rose bending cagerly over her on the other side, walked slowly along the mall, and told her story. They had been received with much stiffness and ceremony by Sir John, his son, and his daughter, who evidently thought their late arrival a quite unwarrantable assumption of familiarity. Kindly good-humoured, Lady Dunlop had soothed and comforted Agnes; but the *hauteur* of their reception plunged Harry into a fit of sullen silence, which was even more painful to see than his excitement. Then, Agnes said, some stranger present began to comment severely on the rude cothouses at Maidlin Cross, and to wonder why none of the neighbouring landlords interfered to provide better accommodation for their workmen. That Harry fired at this, and challenging Sir John to do his part, pledged himself that on *his* property it should be immediately looked to, was only what the listeners expected to hear; but he did it with such vehemence and energy, Agnes reported, that some smiled, some looked grave and pitiful, all turned away, and for half an hour before they left, no one spoke to Harry or herself, save good Lady Dunlop, who called her my dear, and patted her shoulder, and did all she could to soothe the shame and bitter feelings, which the neglect of the others wounded beyond soothing.

But Harry was gone this morning to the builder who erected his barns, to see about model cottages; and Agnes almost for the first time began to be alarmed about the means. Could Harry afford to build model houses after all the outlay of his expensive life? He who had pulled down houses and barns to build greater, and who had nothing to put into them, could he afford to go out of his way and spend money thus? But they had all been kept totally in the dark as to Harry's money matters. They had no idea how much he had wasted—how much had gone to Gilbert Allenders, and to the pleasures shared by him; but a momentary review of the past year startled them all. They looked in each other's scared faces, and shook their heads in sudden clear-sightedness as Agnes asked the question, and the truth dawned upon them all.

"Na, na, lad; Allenders has plenty o' siller bye the land, ye may take my word for it," said the slow voice of Geordie Paxton, speaking out of the hay-field at the end of the mall, opposite to Rose's favourite oak. "I spoke to him mysel about

that grand new harrow, and an improvement o' my ain in the plough-graith, when he started farming, and he never boggled at it a minute, though they baith cost siller. Then he has a free hand himsel, and keeps a plentiful house; and you'll no tell me that a man like Allenders—a fine lad, but apt to gang ajee whiles like ither folk—doesna take a good purse to keep himsel gaun, let alane the house and a' thae braw leddies. And so I have reason in my ain mind, as guid as positive knowledge—which I could only have, if he telled me himsel, Rob—to say that Allenders has a guid income coming to him, forbye the land; ten hunder a year—ay, twelve ye may ca' it—would not do more than keep up that house."

Agnes started in dismay, and instinctively put her hand in her pocket for her little book; but, unfortunately, Agnes always forgot to put down her housekeeping in this little book, though she had bought it herself expressly for the purpose; and it was not Agnes's housekeeping that was called in question.

"Sir John's man telled me," said Geordie's companion, with the deliberation of certainty, "that Allenders was naething but a writing clerk in an office afore he got the estate, and that he hasna a penny o' his ain; the story is no mine, but I would like to hear who should ken if it wasna Sir John's man?"

"I dinna believe a word o' it," said Geordie, hastily. "Would Sir John keep that auld body of an uncle of mine useless about the house, do you think, and gie him a' his ain gait, and cleed him, and feed him, for the auld family's sake, and because he's been a faithful servant? I trow no: and folk that live in glass houses shouldna throw stanes. I reckon Sir John's no fashed wi' ower muckle siller himsel."

"That's naething to the question," returned his dogmatical opponent, after one or two sweeps of the scythe among the fragrant grass bore witness that they had resumed their work. "What I say is, that Allenders has naething but the estate, and there'll be a great smash some of thir days; ye can believe me or no, just as you like."

"He has his faults, puir lad, but he's young and he'll mend," said Geordie; "and you wadna ask me to believe that Allenders is clean mad, and out of his wits, which is just the same as saying that he lives at this rate, and has nae siller o' his ain."

The listeners withdrew in dismay and alarm. To Martha

this gossip only confirmed many previous fears, but to the others it came like a revelation.

"If we were ruined, Martha, what would Harry do?" said Agnes. "*We* could work for ourselves, and I am sure I would never mind the change; but Harry—poor Harry! it would break his heart. I thought there could be nothing harder to bear than last night, but, Martha, I think if there is no good change, it will kill me."

"It must not kill you, Agnes," said Martha, speaking very low. "Bairns, hear me; you must let nothing kill you, nothing crush you, even in your inmost hearts, till God sends the messenger that will not be gainsaid; and God grant that he may be far off from you both. Now it is coming—maybe ruin, maybe destruction, certain distress and anguish. If I could bear it all, you should never hear when it drew near; but it must come upon you both—upon you both, tender, delicate things, that should be blessed with the dews of your youth. But the end is coming which God knows; you must not pine, you must not weep, you must not waste your strength with mourning. Bairns, we have to wait, and be ready and strong, to meet it when it comes. This is what we have to do."

As Martha spoke, she held in her grasp the soft, warm hands of Agnes and Rose. They looked up to her, one on either side, like children to a mother, with lifted eyes, wistful and eager. It was not necessary to answer, but they went back again to the house together, with a strange strain in their hearts, something like the bodily strain which their eager bend towards Martha and anxious look up to her had produced. They were warned, prepared, ready for the evil; and they thought they had reached to the sublime sadness of patience, and would not fret or chafe over the daily griefs again, but rather would be strong for the end.

CHAPTER XLI.

Life will not flow as rivers flow, or seas;
It is a flood, but made of raindrops; days,
And hours, moments—several, pitiless.

BUT still the days, each with its daily burden, wore out the faltering strength, which tried to endure them calmly, and

look towards the end—the end great and solemn, which would demand all their might when it came, was obscured with smaller miseries coming hour by hour, which called for less preparation, and were less easily endured.

Secretly within herself, Agnes said again that this would kill her—secretly Rose murmured that her heart was like to break; and from the solemn calm of patience they descended into the burning fever of constant anxiety, of hourly jealous fear and watching; but Martha's warning and the constant desire to see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears, what Harry did and said, preserved them from the bodily maladies which might have attended this feverish strain of heart and mind. They were one in their anxieties, their thoughts, their fears; yet none could trust the other to report for her what was every day's state—none could afford to be ill, or take shelter in bed or chamber. Day by day they watched, and night by night kept vigils, taking only such sleep as nature compelled.

And Harry, poor Harry! went on sinking, neglecting the love which in his real heart was dearer to him a hundred times than all the objects he pursued in his infatuation. Like a man on the smooth incline of some frightful downright slope, he seemed to lose all power after the first impetus was given, and went sheer down without a pause or stay. Poor Harry! if he was sullen sometimes, at other some there came to him bursts of exceeding tenderness, remorseful and pathetic, as if his better angel was weeping within him, over his ruin; but still he went down—clutching at the flowers which waved over the edge of the precipice, and darting down its rapid incline with their torn blossoms in his hand; but the downward progress was never stayed.

The next day after Sir John Dunlop's unfortunate party, Harry, heated and defiant, took his builder with him to visit the cottages at Maidlin. Harry desired to see the finest plans, the best models, and to plant such an exotic English village as great lords make for playthings, on that part of Maidlin which bordered on his estate.

"Don't mind uniformity—don't take any pains to make it correspond with the other half," said Harry, in excitement and anger. "Let Sir John Dunlop have pigsties if he likes for *his* men. All I care about is my share, and you must spare no pains on that."

"But the expense, Allenders?" said the builder, with

perplexity and disconcertment, "it's sure to take a heap of money."

"Never mind the money," said Harry, loftily, "that is my concern—yours is to make a handsome village on this side of the Cross, and the other houses can be pulled down afterwards; let me have plans and estimates as soon as they can be prepared, and see that you are not content with inferior models. Let Sir John look to his own; I have nothing to do with that."

"Very well, Allenders," said the man doubtfully, "very well; I'll see about the plans, and if ye're pleased, and no scared wi' the expense, we may soon win to—but it'll take a lot of siller."

Young Mr. Dunlop passed on horseback along the highway as the man spoke. The stiffest and most formal salutations passed between him and Harry. Henceforth it was evident that there was no more friendship to be looked for there. The builder went home much perplexed, and had his plans prepared only very deliberately. He could not believe that so small an estate as Allenders could afford such an expensive whim as this.

And Armstrong shook his head over the fields, bearing still a scanty insufficient crop, and honestly deplored and lamented the daily visits which Harry paid to his lodger, Gilbert Allenders. Gilbert had scarcely the shadow of an excuse, in the way of medical practice, for his residence here; and the universal prejudice which accused him of "leading away" the unfortunate young man of whom everybody was inclined to think well, was not without its foundation. But Harry—poor Harry! he was always "led away"—and it was so easy to find a tempter.

A life of coarse dissipation had become, by long practice, the natural breath of Gilbert Allenders; he could not live soberly and quietly as other men did; he felt it necessary to fill every day as it came with its proportion of excitements and pleasures, as he called them; and in a sense very widely apart from the commanded one, he took no thought for the morrow. It pleased him, in some degree, to "lead" Harry "away;" he felt a certain gratification in possessing the power; but though there might lurk at the bottom of his heart a secret grudge against the stranger who had dispossessed him of the inheritance he once reckoned upon, and a secret pleasure in thus avenging himself, it lay far down in

the depths, and Gilbert was totally unconscious of its existence. He rather liked Harry on the contrary—liked his society, his wit, and felt his participation in them impart a keener zest to his own recreations. For Gilbert was not a villain, nor ever pursued revenge with purpose or malice; he was only a man of evil habits and impure mind, who felt the burden of his own faults lightened when he could make others partakers in them. And only so far was it true that he led Harry away.

The harvest came with its sudden increase of labourers, and flocks of shearers crowded into Harry's field; but the poor Highland wanderers and far-travelled Irish lingered about the farm-steading of Allender Mains, and lost days that might have been profitable to them, waiting for the wages which Harry did not know were due.

The joyous autumn began to wane, and Harry's thrashing-mill began to work, throwing out its banner of blue smoke above the trees. But Harry's hopes came to no harvest—the long-neglected land still bore scantily—the slender crops did not pay, nor nearly pay for their culture. Not even William Hunter's rent came in now to give the embarrassed laird an income, and his second half-yearly payment of interest was due at Martinmas, with only enough remaining to pay it of his last thousand pounds; and no provision made for the whole long year which must intervene between this and another harvest—nothing to continue the cultivation which should make another harvest profitable—nothing to maintain the expensive household, which now in Allenders waited for its fate; and Harry looked before him, and around, and muttered curses on his own folly, and saw no way of deliverance.

He could not spring out of his ruin, he could do nothing to make himself free; but he could forget and drown it, and he did so.

No kindly neighbours now entered the house of Allenders. Good Lady Dunlop took stolen opportunities of alighting from her carriage on the road, when her daughter was not with her, to comfort the poor little wife, over whom her motherly heart yearned; and the ladies of Nettlehaugh and Foggo Barns, made their salutations at church, and eased their consciences. Agnes herself began to grow nervous, to start at sudden sounds, and be shaken by passing voices. Her hand trembled more than Harry's did, sometimes, and when he put away from him with loathing the simple, wholesome food he could no

longer take, Agnes grew so sick that she could not keep her seat. Her baby did not thrive—he scarcely could in a house where the one great absorbing interest engaged every thought; no one sang to him now, except Mysie—scarcely any one had the heart to play with him—and the poor infant

“— caught the trick of grief,
And sighed among its playthings.”

Rose, with no resource of dreaming left to her, tried to dull her heart with constant labour, and wandered out in the early morning, while the dew was still on the grass, to sit by the Lady's Well, where Lettie, wistful and anxious, found her out often, and sat at her feet in silence, touching her softly with little caressing hands, and wondering with pensive thoughts over the mystery which made Rose “like to break her heart;” for Lettie knew that other griefs than the family fear for Harry, bore down upon the gentle spirit of her sister Rose.

And when Harry was out, they drew together instinctively, and sat working in Martha's room. And Martha roused herself, and with the ready associations and strange flow of simple words, which she thought were signs and tokens of approaching age, told them stories of actual life, homely, real histories, in which there was always interest, and often consolation. She wondered herself at the clear memory which recalled to her those numberless tales of the neighbour families in Ayr—stories of household affliction, sometimes only too like their own—but still one continued to lead to another; and Rose and Agnes worked beside her, and listened, and the tedium of the long, sad hours was beguiled. Yet, though she did all this to give some partial and temporary lightening to them, heavy as death within her was Martha's own strained heart.

CHAPTER XLII.

Two peaceful days. And what should hap in these,
But things of common life? He will return
As safe as he went hence.

LATE in the end of October, when Katie Calder began to speak of Hallowe'en, and to consult with Jeanie Armstrong at Allen-

der Mains, on the best place to pull the "kailstocks," and practise the other spells proper to the occasion, Harry told his anxious household that he was going to Edinburgh. They had observed that he was gloomy and depressed for some days before, though he had been less than usual from home. Now he told them vaguely about money which was wanted, and expenses which had been incurred, and that his errand to Edinburgh was on business very important to him. When Martha and Agnes pressed for more definite information, Harry fell back upon his morose and gloomy silence. It was useless to be making inquiries, for many a thing must have been told, if Harry had begun to satisfy them, which he would never suffer to reach their ears.

And no one went with him to Stirling this time to see him off. When even Gilbert Allenders proposed to go, Harry answered him with an instant and not very courteous negative, and Agnes's wistful looks passed quite unnoticed. He rode away, silently, too much abstracted, as it seemed, to turn back and wave his hand to his wife and his sisters at their window, as he was wont to do; but when he was past the gate and almost out of sight upon the road—out of sight entirely to eyes less eager—they saw him start and turn round, and wave back to them the usual gesture of farewell. Agnes thrust herself half out of the window of the drawing-room to return it, with tears in her eyes; and then she saw his head droop again upon his breast, and he rode away.

On the third night after, he had instructed them to send John with his horse to meet him in Stirling. He expected to arrive there at four or five in the afternoon, and to be home immediately after. With the most zealous care, Agnes recorded all Harry's directions, and impressed them on the mind of John when he returned. He had seen his master safely off upon the coach, and so far all was well.

The third night following was Hallowe'en, and even Lettie, absorbed with the expectation of entertaining her little sentimental friend from Blaelodge, and one or two other children, with the appropriate pastimes of the night, forgot that Harry was coming home. But punctually to the hour, John and the horse trotted out from the gate of Allenders, followed by the wistful eyes of Agnes. Agnes longed to send the carriage; but such was not Harry's will, and in his present mood she could not contradict him.

Great fires blazed in the two family sitting-rooms, for the

night was damp and cold, and needed this cheerful gleam to brighten it for the traveller. Some special delicacies for Harry's dinner were being superintended in the kitchen by Agnes herself, and the glittering tea-service sparkled already before the drawing-room fire, while Rose saw that Harry's own room grew bright and warm with firelight, and that everything he needed lay ready for his comfort. The early night fell when they were thus employed; but when everything was done that could be thought of, and preparations made as great as if he had been a year away, they sat down in the twilight, crowding about the window, and looking out from the warm flush of light within upon the uncertain grey which lay upon the sky and hills.

But the grey tints vanished, and the full gloom of night blotted out the landscape—blotted out even the gate and its trees—the very walnut on the lawn—and palpable blackness pressed upon the window, and upon the eyes which still looked steadily out on this compressed, uncreviced gloom—and Harry did not come.

They would not light candles to remind them that he was late—they would not hear the clock strike hour by hour. Sometimes with faint smiles they spoke to each other of the childish mirth whose sounds they could hear ascending from below, but oftenest they were entirely silent, except for a whispered "Listen! I hear the horse on the road," or "This is Harry now;" but it never was Harry. And the sound of horses' hoofs seemed to echo perpetually through the starless solemn night. And midnight came, and still they watched—now in a very agony.

At last they heard the sound of the opened gate, and a single horseman became slowly perceptible approaching through the gloom. Throwing down the chair she had been seated on, in haste and excitement, Agnes ran down stairs, and Martha and Rose, putting restraint upon themselves, followed a little more slowly. But they had not reached the hall when they heard the voice of John, reporting how Allenders had sent him on before to tell them that the coach had been detained much beyond its time, and that he himself was on the road, and would be immediately at home.

Poor little Agnes turned from the door, and hiding her face in Martha's breast, wept quietly tears of deferred hope. And Rose went forward to the door in the darkness, anxious, if possible, to hear something of Harry's looks from John.

"Was my brother much wearied?" said Rose timidly. "The road is very dark. I am sorry you left him, John—he does not know the way so well as you."

"Allenders was very thoughtful-like," said John, with a quick apprehension of what she meant; "and I ken the coach was lang after its time; but I dinna think Allenders was wearied, to speak o'. And he guides the horse better than ony ither body now, and he was very anxious to be hame."

She could not ask, nor be told more, and they went back to their window to watch again; while Rose, begging to be told whenever they heard Harry, had the fires hastily renewed, herself assisting sleepy Mysie, who, though she nodded by the kitchen fire would not go to bed, and leave them watching alone.

CHAPTER XLIII.

There's a dark spirit walking in our house,
And swiftly will the destiny close on us.

SCHILLER.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when the Edinburgh coach reached Stirling, carrying Harry, much subdued and cast down, but in reality this time detained by obstacles over which he had no control. During all this journey he had been contemplating the grim strength of ruin face to face—feeling himself now utterly beyond help or hope, able to do nothing but sit down and wait for the final blow. The place at which he had appointed his servant to meet him was some distance from the coach-office; and taking his little valise in his hand, Harry walked with a heavy, weary step, much unlike his usual elastic one, to find John.

The streets were still and deserted, the shops shut, the lights extinguished in almost every house he passed. The very public houses, inns, and lower places of the same kind had put out all but one solitary lamp, which, just enough to light those who were within, looked dreary and melancholy to everybody without. Harry went along the street feeling himself an utter stranger here. This was partly true; for the friends he had made were of a very unpromising kind, and, themselves broken men for the most part, could render little comfort to a

man at the point of ruin ; but partly it was the mere desolation of the silent street, echoing to his footstep, which impressed the sensitive mind of Harry. He went along with his valise under his arm, and his pale face drooping—a face marked with lines of altogether new rigidity, and full of a silent forlorn despair, which it was touching to see in one so young, and naturally so hopeful. He could not tell what chill it was that overpowered his heart—ruin!—a descent from his rank and his inheritance—a return characterless, and with many a new habit of evil, to the occupation in which once before he had failed—worse than all, the remembrance of his sins, which returned to look him in the face like upbraiding spirits. Yet even this was not all : a vague dread, a shivering, mysterious presentiment of some unknown evil to come, hovered over these real griefs, and gave them shape and form, in a torpor of despair.

He set out upon the road with his servant at a rapid pace ; but in spite of himself, the tramp of John's horse, continually taking the course of his own behind, irritated him almost beyond endurance. He suffered it as long as he could, feeling his irritation a weakness ; but at last yielded to the overpowering sense of annoyance which this trifling matter occasioned him, and sent his man on, following himself more slowly.

The night was very dark—dark as it is only in a perfectly rural country ; and as the ringing silence closed about him, and he heard nothing but an occasional sigh from the river, or a faint flutter among the falling leaves, or the sound of his own progress upon the solitary road, Harry's thoughts strayed away from his great miseries. Once or twice, a leaf in its descent blew across his face, and made his horse wince, and his heart beat—and then, there returned upon Harry his vague and inexpressible fear ; but shut out from every *sight*, as he was, by his utter darkness, there rose up scenes of cheerful light before his imagination, beautiful to see : Uncle Sandy's house at Ayr—the little parlour in Glasgow—the home in Alglers to which he was returning. A strange, dreamy pleasure stole over him—he forgot his sins, his misfortunes, his near and inevitable ruin—he thought of the home enjoyments which no man had known more largely—he thought of his little loving wife—of the passionate affection of Martha—of Rose's gentler tenderness, and strange little poetic Lettie, with her wistful eyes. Poor Harry ! his heart swelled with sudden relief, as these came to his imagination : little domestic remem-

brances, looks, words, innocent mistakes and blunders, things which long ago brought pleasant, kindly laughter, or tender tears to the faces of them all. The reins fell loosely on his horse's neck as he resigned himself to this repose; and the cottage firesides at Maidlin, and the boyish companions of Ayr, looked in, and interwove themselves with those fancies of home. Sometimes he tried to rouse himself, and a sharp pain shot through his heart as for a moment he remembered his real state and prospects; but still this singular dream returned upon him, and in his heart he thanked God!

Meanwhile, in Allenders they sit and watch, looking out with dread and sickening pain into the darkness, praying till their hearts are again "like to break." Sometimes Agnes kneels down by a chair, and hides her face, and utters a low unconscious cry; sometimes Martha walks heavily up or down the room, pausing in the midst, to think she hears in reality the sound which has mocked them in the imagination all the night. "I am going to my own room—do not come to me," said Martha, at last, in a half whisper, and she left them without another word.

But not to her own chamber to weep or pray, as they thought; Mysie nodding by the kitchen fire was suddenly startled by Martha's appearance, with a rigid white face like death, and cloak enveloping her whole person. With a slight scream, the drowsy girl started to her feet, scarcely knowing if she saw a human being or a spirit.

"Mysie, you are bold," said Martha, with such distinct rapidity that her words seemed to occupy no time. "I want the carriage instantly. I am going to seek my brother. Come, and show me what has to be done."

"I'll waken John," said the terrified Mysie.

"I do not require John. What is to be done I can do myself. Give me a light."

But Mysie, who was in reality a brave girl, and could manage horses as easily as she managed the brown cow, and who besides doted on little Harry and the baby, and would not have hesitated at even a greater thing for their father, answered by lifting John's lantern; and catching down a plaid which hung on the wall as they passed, she led the way to the stables without another word.

It was a strange scene: Mysie excited, and still half dreaming, forced the unwilling horse between the shafts; and Martha, like a marble statue, with hands which never trem-

bled nor hesitated, secured the fastening in perfect silence. John could not have done this daily business of his in half the time which it took these women to lead the carriage softly out of the stables round by a lane behind the house into the highway. They had no time to seek for the lamps to light them, so Martha carried the lantern in her hand, and held it up into the darkness as they advanced, while Mysie drove on steadily toward Stirling.

They had not gone a mile, Martha continually lifting her lantern and gazing into the gloom, when they heard that some one on a galloping horse approached them. Martha rose to her feet, and held up the light. It seemed to scare the animal, who suddenly paused, with reins dangling on his neck, and foam upon his breast; but he was riderless. "It's Allenders' ain horse," said Mysie, in a strong hissing whisper through her closed teeth, as she touched the bay in the carriage with her whip, and with a leap they proceeded. But Martha desperately caught at the reins of the other horse, and grasped them—she could not, even in her agony for Harry, bear to think that her other children should receive such a dreadful shock as this while she was not with them to strengthen them. And the exhausted animal went on quietly for a little time—then he began to plunge and rear, and turn towards home. "Let him go—let him go," again whispered Mysie, now desperate with anxiety and fright. "You canna get lookit at the roadside for hauding him—let him go."

And Martha did let him go.

Not twenty yards farther on, their horse suddenly came to a dead pause—and there, lying across the highway, was a dark figure, with a battered hat by its side, and the face gleaming ghastly in the light of Martha's lantern. She was bending over him before Mysie's first gasp of terror gave her breath; and Martha's white lips were calling upon God, upon God—but no sound came from them upon the heavy darkness.

And the heart beats faintly still in Harry's breast, and the blood oozes slowly from the cut upon his brow. She feels it warm upon her hands—this is how she knows it to be blood—as she lifts his death-like face upon her knee; and still as her hand presses upon his heart, and she bends her cheek to his lips to feel if he still breathes, Martha calls upon the name of the Lord. The name—she can say nothing but the name—but in it is all prayer.

And now she lifts him up into her own arms, up to the

fierce heart which has throbbed with passionate love for him all his life. Mysie, humbly and with terror, asked to help her; but Martha, rising from her knee with all her burden in her arms, thrusts away unconsciously the trembling aid, and places him—her boy, her son, poor Harry!—in the carriage like a child. Then through the gloom, which no longer needs a light, through the horror of darkness, which lies over them like a cloak of iron, pressing down upon their very hearts, and hiding the face upon which Martha's eyes are fixed continually, though she can only *feel* it where it lies upon her knee—through this night of solemn gloom and terror, which is the end—home!

And now, Harry's horse neighs and craves admittance at his stable-door; and John, roused out of the sleep from which Mysie had promised to wake him on his master's return, starts up terrified, and cannot find his lantern nor the key, which Martha's trembling helper has left in the stable-door; and Rose and Agnes rushed together, in terror which has no voice, to seek Martha in her room, and finding her gone, flee out into the impenetrable darkness and call to John for the lamps he cannot find, and carry uncovered candles—which, in the damp air will not burn—to the gate, with a terrible apprehension of stumbling over Harry in their path; but, still, accident—any but the slightest—does not cross their distracted minds and they never once think of death.

Yet anguish and terrible dread come upon them as they struggle on along the dark way, groping for they know not what, while the darkness blinds their eyes, and chokes their very breath. But far on—far along the road, where there is a little eminence, half a mile away, appears a faint, slowly moving light. Instinctively drawing closer together, they stand, and listen, and watch this speck in the intense gloom. And Agnes does not know that her incoherent prayers are said aloud; nor does Rose, though she remembers words of them after, like the broken words of a dream.

But the light comes nearer; and John, who has turned his master's horse into the stable, and given him water, comes back, to grope his way to his young mistress on the road, and stand beside her, watching the slow motion of this distant light. Defenceless and open stands the house of Allenders, where children lie asleep, serene and peaceful, worn out with pleasure; and not even the watchers at the gate, amid all their terror and apprehension, have any idea what it is, which comes towards them through the night.

What is it? Mysie, hearing some far-off whisper of voices, holds up her lantern, unwitting that the chief light it throws is upon those two behind. Martha, sitting rigid in the carriage, with a face of deadly whiteness on her knee, and her hand pressing upon the heart of the passive insensible form—pressing against it, as if the frail life needed to be held fast, lest it should glide away. A shrill cry startles the darkness at their side, and Martha only knows they have reached the gate of Allenders, when she hears Harry's little gentle wife fall heavily upon the ground, and is startled by the cry of Rose.

Mysie, frightened and exhausted, stopped the carriage. "Drive on!" said Martha, and her lips spoke the words half-a-dozen times before they broke, shrill and loud, upon Mysie's terrified ear. "Rose, be calm. John, carry Agnes in. I, myself, will care for Harry; he is alive."

Alive!—but that was all!

Candles stood wasting on the hall table, and the cold black air stole in heavily, damp and chill. Upon the stairs, a little white figure called on Martha and Rose, and shivered, and cast looks of terror on the open door. For Violet had been dreaming of Harry—dreaming terrible dreams—and she could not rest.

"Let me carry him. I'm stronger than you, and I'll be as tender as a woman," pleaded the awe-stricken John.

But Martha pushed him aside. "A doctor—a doctor! instantly!"

It was all she could say, as she lifted up her burden.

It was well for Martha that her frame was strong, and hardly strung; for Mysie, who silently assisted, and supported poor Harry's feet, left still the great weight of his insensible form in Martha's arms; and Martha felt the strain when it was over—she knew nothing of it now.

Alas, poor Harry!—they laid him on his bed; they clustered round him, the faces which he had seen in his imagination two little hours ago, so fresh and bright. In this room, where the fire was faintly dying, were arranged many little things which Rose had fancied he might want when he came home; but there he lay, with the blood upon his brow, unconscious, silent, with nothing but his heavy breathing to tell them that he was alive.

And immediately they heard the desperate gallop at which John set off, to bring the doctor. The doctor—not Gilbert Allenders, but a respectable surgeon in the neighbourhood—

returned with him without delay ; and John took especial pains to inform him on the road, that Allenders was "as muckle himsel as I am," when they parted.

Poor Harry's leg was broken again ; he had sustained some severe internal injuries, and was terribly bruised over his whole frame. The surgeon remained all the night, and did every thing it was possible for him to do, dispatching John to Stirling for assistance before the dawn. But when the grey still morning began to steal into the room, and Harry, faintly conscious, lay moaning on his bed, Agnes clasping her hands in sorrowful entreaty ; and lifting up her pathetic eyes to the doctor's face, asked if there was any hope.

When she asked, she had scarcely any doubt there was. Danger, suffering, even positive agonies of endurance were before him, she saw ; but Harry's wife did not think he could die.

"We have always hope so long as there is life," said the doctor, turning his head away.

And Agnes gasped and fell again. It was the warrant of death.

"Will he die ?" said Martha, crushing her hands together as she too looked, but with eyes that demanded an answer, in the doctor's face.

He waved his hand, and again turned away. The good man saw the mighty love which would detain and hold this parting soul, and he could not meet its despair.

"Harry will die !"—no one said it ; no one spoke those terrible words of doom ; but it seemed to them all that the air was heavy with the sentence ; and from Martha, who never wearied and never closed her eyes, ministering by his bedside within, to little Lettie crouching close to his door, and praying that God would take her—only take her, and save "my Harry ;" there was not one among them who did not carry in their very face this great and terrible doom.

Wiping the deadly dew from his brow, administering to him the almost hourly opiates, which no hand in the house, except her own, not even the surgeon's, was steady enough to prepare, Martha watched by him night and day. Harry was seldom conscious, seldom able to recognize, or address his nurse ; but in his broken ravings were things that touched her to the heart ; things of the pure youth—the household life ; nothing—they all thanked God for the especial mercy—nothing mingling with these innocent remembrances, of his times of secret sin.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Fond dreaming hearts—an old man and a child!

“MISS LETTIE, the auld man’s ta’en an ill turn. He cries for you to gang and tell him how the maister is—will ye gang to the loft and speak to the auld man, Miss Lettie?”

Violet left her place at Harry’s door, and went.

Old Adam lay upon his bed in his ordinary dress, with his long, brown, lean fingers lying crossed upon the homely cover, as if they were clutching it—but in reality they grasped nothing. A feeble tremble was in his frame as he lay vacantly looking up to the rafters above him; and his ashy face, though indeed it was scarcely paler than usual, struck Violet with terror, as if it had been the very face of death.

“Oh Dragon, my Harry!” cried poor little Lettie.

“They tell me the horse had thrown him, and dragged him along the road wi’ ae fit aye the stirrup—was that true, Missie? and I aye kent mysel it was a thrawart beast, and no to be depended on,” said Dragon. “I’ve been lying here thinking on the puir lad, this haill morning; and I was just putting it ower in my mind if it wadna be best to crave the Lord to take *me*, and spare the young life; but I never can win that length though I try—for I aye mind I’m a harmless auld body, doing ill to nae man, and what for should I ask to die?”

“Would God do that, Dragon? Would God take somebody else, and leave Harry? Oh! will ye ask Him to take me?” cried Harry’s little sister, “for he’s very ill, and Martha thinks he will die. Dragon, if God would take you and me, and save Harry, would you no come? and God would aye let us see the sun shining on the water, and a’ body blythe in Al-lenders—Dragon, if we were in heaven!”

And Violet’s passionate cry, and voice choked with sobbing, again awoke the old man’s torpid heart. He raised himself from his bed feebly, and leaning on his elbow, looked at the little figure kneeling by his bedside, with its clasped hands, and gleaming eyes.—and Adam Comrie slowly shook his head.

“Missie, I’m auld—I whiles forget things I ken weel, and speak as if I was a bairn mysel; but ae life canna redeem

anither, little bairn. Na, na, I wad gang wi' ye blythe, puir wee innocent heart, to take care of ye—if God didna send an angel to take care of us baith—” said the old man, with a momentary wandering, “but there never was but Ane, that could redeem lives out of God’s hand with His ain. We’re a’ forfeit ourselves, bairnie; if my life was mine, and yours your ain, we might offer them for Mr. Hairy; but God has your bit heartie in His hand, as well as mine, and will lay them quiet when it is His pleasure, and no a day before. There *was* Ane that had His life free to lay down, and free to take up—and there was but Ane. I’ve had glimmerings o’ Him mysel,” continued Dragon, fixing his unsteady eyes on the roof, and wandering from the first subject into the more immediate personal interest which his own words recalled to him, “glimmerings like blinks of the sun out of clouds; but if I whiles lose mind of the Lord—for I’m auld and feeble, and sae lang in this world, that it’s ill to believe I have to gang away—if *I* whiles lose mind, that am but a puir useless creature, is that to say that He loses mind o’ me?—as if *He* didna ken what was the guid reason, wherefore, I wasna taken hence in my strength, but left to wear out my days like a sleep, and to forget! Ane might think the like o’ me, sae aged and frail, had been forgotten out of the course of nature; and left because He didna mind—but never you trow that, bairnie—I ken He minds, and when it’s my time, He’ll send for me, as thoughtful as if I was the grandest man on this earth. What’s about *my* memory, though it whiles can carry naething but bairnly things? Is that to rule His, think ye, that grows not auld for ever? And I ken He never forgets.”

Absorbed and full of awe, Violet followed unconsciously the half-palsied wave of the old man’s head and figure as he spoke, and watched the unusual gleam which shot from the eyes, which he in vain tried to fix on the rafter. Poor, dim unsteady eyes! they glanced about in every direction, as if they possessed some distinct energy and will of their own.

But when Adam sank back on his pillow, Lettie shivered and thought she had forgotten Harry—poor Harry! She could still hear his moan in her ears.

“Oh, my Harry, my Harry! Dragon, do ye think God will take him up—up—yonder beside Him?” and Lettie turned her eyes full of dark wistful reverence and fear upon the old man’s face.

“Wad God take you, and me, think ye, to save him?” said

Dragon, now wandering back into a mild half-delirious waking sleep, "but then we're forfeit—forfeit—and there was but Ane. I'm content to gang, bairnie, content to gang—where's your hand? and I dinna ken how we maun travel, but the angel will tell us when he comes; and I'll take care o' ye a' the way, for we're no to expect the angel, that's a stranger, to take heed to a' a little bairn's wants like the like of me. Ye can say we're ready. Ye can say I've got the better o' mysel, and I'm willing to gang."

But Lettie, excited and terrified, dared not say aloud the strange prayer, "Take Dragon and me, and save Harry," which was in her heart.

And Dragon's feeble hand tightened on hers, till Lettie looking up in a fright and sudden fear, saw that his head had fallen back, and that an ashy paleness like that of his face was creeping over the rigid fingers which grasped her own. But Dragon's loud and heavy breathing showed her that this was not death. Lettie withdrew her hand with pain and difficulty from his grasp, and ran to call assistance. She pressed her finger on her own pulse, as she followed Mysie and the doctor back again to the old man's bedside, and a strange cold thrill of fear and expectation shot through her frame. Poor little visionary Lettie! She thought her prayer was heard—she thought the angel had called Dragon, and it became her to be ready now.

But Lettie's shivering hope was vain. A slight almost momentary "shock" had come upon the old man, but it passed away. It passed away—nature began to warm again in the withered worn-out frame, and Lettie's pulse beat true and steady, with a young life whose delicate strength should yet bear many things—while hour by hour the tide of strong manhood ebbed, and Harry, poor Harry! drew nearer to his grave.



CHAPTER XLV.

And Love himself, as he were armed in steel,
Steps forth, and girds him for the strife with death.
PICCOLOMINI.

THE doctors were in almost constant attendance—the minister of the parish came to pray by the bedside of the half-

conscious patient, whose heavy moans broke in upon his supplication. The children of Maidlin, awe-stricken and full of wonder and curiosity, hung about the gate of Allenders, telling each other how Harry fell, and how the trail was found on the road, where his horse had dragged him along the damp, loose soil. And their mothers came in bands in the early afternoon to speak of it with kindred awe and mystery, and stealing round by the back of the house, beckoned Mysie out to learn from her how the sufferer was. More dignified people, and even Sir John Dunlop himself, sent messengers to inquire for poor Harry; and Gilbert Allenders, like an ill-omened shadow, continually hovered about the door.

Poor Harry! they never spoke to each other, these women who watched him; but Agnes and Rose perceived when they approached the bed that it was only a strong self-restraint which prevented Martha from thrusting them away. She was jealous now, even of them—she could not bear to see him touched by any hand but her own—as if it was her hand alone which could touch him without inflicting pain; and they saw her shiver when the surgeon drew near him, as if with bodily fear. And sometimes, when Martha laid Agnes down upon the sofa in this sad sick room, and covered her tenderly as if she were a child, an hour of feverish sleep would fall upon the little wife; and Rose, when sent to her own room for the night, after lingering at the door, and wandering up and down to see if anything could possibly be wanted which was not ready, would weep herself into a trance of slumber, from which the awakening was bitter—but Martha never slept.

And Harry lay upon his bed, unconscious, and never said a word which testified that he knew them there. Conscious of pain—conscious of the agony of being touched or moved, which drew from him those shrill cries and heavy moanings—and with dim, dreamy eyes, which seemed to recognize sometimes where it was he lay, as they wandered over the well-known furniture; but though he spoke of them all in his time of greater ease, and addressed them by loving names, which brought a swooning deadly sickness over Agnes, and convulsed Martha with a terrible tenderness, he never spoke to them as present beside him; wandering broken lines of thought, strange visible associations which connected one distant thing with another, came from him in an interrupted flow—and sometimes strange half dreaming prayers, exclaimed vehemently at one time, at another repeated with a placid smile like a

child's—"Lead us not into temptation—deliver us from evil," made up the prolonged and audible reverie of Harry's stricken soul.

On the morning of the third day, while Martha sat beside him on one side, and Agnes, with her face buried in the coverlet, knelt by the bed, silently praying and weeping, on the other, a gradual awakening came to Harry's face. Martha, whose look never left it, saw the dreamy eyes light up, at first faintly, but gradually rising into life. Then he saw Agnes, and stealing his feeble hand along the bed, laid it on her head. She started up with a faint cry, and Harry's trance was broken.

"Am I to die?" he said, in a whisper, when for some moments they had held his hands in silence—his hands, one of which was bathed in the tears of Agnes, while on the other had fallen a single great burning drop, falling from Martha's heavy eyelid, like a drop of living fire.

But no answer came to him, except the convulsive sobs of Agnes, and a tightened and clinging pressure of the hand which lay in Martha's grasp.

"Then let me see them, Martha," said Harry, faintly; "let me see them all once again. You will be better without me, and I will be better away. Oh God! my God! I have lost a life."

"But not a soul, Harry—not a soul," cried Martha, bending down her head, to kiss with burning vehemence the hand on which her tears fell now like hail-drops. "First look up, Harry, my son! my son!—and there is another life!"

And the dim eyes turned upward to the roof—to the human mortal screen built between him and the sky; and saw, not the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, but only a household of weeping women, half frantic with love and eagerness, crying aloud for him before the everlasting throne, where mercy sits and judgment; and a blank numbness was on Harry's soul. He could not throw himself before this footstool, and ask with his last breath for that deliverance which comes from Him who never thrust one empty away. Sleep was upon him, and he craved repose; he trusted to them who interceded—he leaned with faint consciousness upon their supplications; but for himself he could ask nothing—his heart was voiceless, apathetic, asleep.

"Pray for me, Martha," said Harry, faintly.

For this was all his hope.

Pray for him ! When was it, working or resting, that Martha forgot thus to pray ?

"And gather them all," said Harry—"gather them all in here, that I may see them before I die."

He said the words with a faint, mournful pathos. He was not rebellious to his doom—poor Harry ! but it seemed to him that he was sinking into some pensive, gentle rest. This was how the visible death, drawing near, disclosed itself, in the midst of his great pain, to his heart.

And Martha called them in, one by one—Rose, Lettie, Katie Calder, little Harry, and the infant boy. You would have thought, to hear him speak, that this dying man was passing away into the heaven which he already knew for home, and that there interposed no obscuring cloud between him and the sky ; or that this suffering of death consciously made up for all the evil that had gone before—for neither remorse nor terror overshadowed Harry, nor did he speak of faith. Poor Harry ! this benumbed and quiet peace seemed all he desired.

And when he had bidden them farewell, gently, faintly, without any violence of emotion—with a perfect calm and submission, and what people call resignation to the will of God—Harry laid himself down again to die.

But his head had scarcely fallen back again upon the pillow, when he started violently—a start which wrung from him a half scream of pain.

"Send for Lindsay, Martha !—send for Robertson, in Stirling ! Any one—any one you can get most easily !—at once, before I die !"

Without hesitation, Martha went to obey his order ; and John, who was swift and ready, was in the saddle in a very few minutes, galloping to Stirling for a lawyer.

But when Martha returned to the sick chamber, Harry had relapsed into unconsciousness, and she sat down, watching by him silently, as she had done before. Within a few hours the lawyer came. The whole country rang with the news of the accident, and people forgot how they had condemned poor Allenders, in pity for him, and for the family, whose singular devotion to him it needed little discernment to discover. So Mr. Robertson had left his house at once, to his own inconvenience, to come to the dying man. But Harry lay upon his bed, communing aloud with his own heart ; and the very lawyer turned aside and wept, as he heard this heart laid

open. A sinful man had Harry been!—shipwrecked and lost! Yet it was a child's heart!

And Martha's words, or an influence more wonderful than them, was breathing on the chaos of this disturbed and wandering soul. Poor Harry! And his lips spoke loud the texts and psalms which he had learned a child, at Martha's knee. In the room there was a hush like death, through which now and then the restrained sob of Agnes struggled faintly. She was still lying in the same position, her face hidden, in prostrate, powerless grief; and Rose knelt beside her, pale as death, fixing the eyes, from which her tears fell down continually, upon Harry's face, while her throat quivered now and then with a convulsive gasp. Martha, at his other side, with her head bent upon her folded arms, shook with great tremblings, like successive waves—but no sound came from her; and the lawyer, afraid to move, and full of awe, stood silent at the foot of the bed. Through this scene ascended Harry's voice, low and faint, but distinctly audible; and now he reads from his child's memory, what has been read by his bedside only recently, in hope to catch some passing gleam of consciousness—the last words of the Lord!

O! wonderful, benign and tender words!—spoken under the very death-shadow, by that One who alone was free to redeem—who can tell what was their influence upon the rapt soul, which, past all human intercourse, was still open to the dealings of the Lord? Mysterious awe and wonder hushed even their very prayers. No human speech could move him now, or reach his veiled and hidden soul: but the way was all open to God.

All through the night Harry continued thus—with broken prayers, and words of Holy Writ, mingling with the common things to which he sometimes returned—and towards the dawn he fell into a broken sleep.

The lawyer, meanwhile, waited. It was a singular kindness; but Harry might awake out of his trance at any moment, and this man, who had a kindly heart, was concerned for the family, and sufficiently interested to give his time without much grudging. And they had all a vague expectation that Harry would awake from this sleep, in possession of his faculties.

They were right, he did so; and after a few minutes of repose and contemplation, and of tender words to those around him, he started again, and asked for the lawyer. Mr. Robert-

son came from the library, where he had been sitting, and Harry sent his sisters and his wife away.

They were not long shut out from the sick room. The lawyer left the chamber and the house, with a farewell of deep and melancholy sympathy; and for about an hour after, Harry continued conscious of their presence. But this consciousness was broken and disturbed; and afterwards he sank back into a slumberous, interrupted reverie, from which he never woke again.

CHAPTER XLVI.

'Tis over—over: here is no present now;
All life lies in the past.

OLD PLAY.

THERE is a deep hush upon Allenders, the silence of death; and quiet footsteps glide about another sick room, passing by the door, where lies one who shall want human tendance never again. Poor little Agnes, worn out and broken, lies there very ill; and they are watching her night and day, as a week ago they watched Harry—but with better hope.

And now all the dreary *business* of this time falls upon Martha. She thinks they will craze her—those necessary directions which she is compelled to give; and Martha cannot afford to risk either her mind or her health for the family's sake, which now hangs on her hands to be provided for. So the second day after Harry's death she wrote to Charteris, the only friend, near at hand, to whom she could apply.

Martha's letter was abrupt and short; she could not intimate what had come upon them in many words.

"My brother Harry is dead"—this was her letter—"Agnes is ill; and I alone am left to do what this trial requires to be done. You were his friend, and wished him well. Will you come to my aid in this extremity for his sake?"

It might have been the letter of a cold heart. Cuthbert knew better than to think it was.

And from the window of Agnes's sick room, Martha, grave and tearless, watched them carry away the dead. There was a long funeral train, for now that he was dead, every one was ready to pay respect to poor Harry. Little Lettie weeping as

if her heart would break, had seen the hearse stand at the door; now she grew suddenly still, chill, and full of mysterious terror; and when Mysie lifted her from the window, and softly opened the shutters, letting in the hitherto excluded sunshine, Lettie sat down on the carpet in the light, and shivered and sobbed, but could not weep. They had carried him away—poor Harry! where never mortal ear should hear, or mortal eye look on him again; and Lettie's little, trembling heart was overpowered with irresistible longing to see his face; and she could not remember it—could not recall, except in a mist, the features she knew so well.

A few of the most considerable followers of the funeral, Sir John Dunlop and his son, Mr. Haig of Foggo, and Cuthbert Charteris, who had arrived two days before, and arranged everything, returned with the minister, Mr. Robertson the Stirling writer, and Uncle Sandy, to the house. It was a considerable surprise to all, to find, that there was a will, and they returned to be present while it was read.

The party assembled in the dining-room, where the blinds were still closed, and the funeral bread and wine remained on the table. When they had waited for some time, Martha and Rose and little Lettie came in. They were all already dressed in the deepest mourning, and Rose, trembling and half-hysterical, was deadly pale; her eyes wandered from side to side, and she held up her head with a mechanical motion, as if only half conscious where she was. Lettie, wistful and full of mysterious trembling, was still keenly alive to everything that passed, and attended, with her eyes fixed on every speaker with an intense regard, which riveted every word upon her mind. On Martha's usual appearance there was little change. Her eyes were more hollow, perhaps, and the wrinkles deeper in her brow; but that was all. Uncle Sandy, passive and absorbed, sat by them, in perfect silence. The old man was greatly shaken with this unexpected grief.

"Before we begin this business," said the minister, "let us pray again with and for this afflicted family. I am sure they have all our deepest sympathy and good wishes. Let us commend them to the God of consolations."

They were all standing before he concluded; but Cuthbert saw the little gasp and totter with which Rose left her chair, closing her eyes with the blindness of a worn-out heart. He had not time to think if his impulse was prudent; it was enough that he could not stand by, and see her unsupported,

while he was there to give her help. He stepped forward hastily, and taking both her hands into his own, drew one of them through his arm, and held up her weakness with his strength. A little audible sob came from the overcharged breast of Rose. She did not think of Cuthbert, nor was he sufficiently callous to believe she could. She was thinking of poor Harry in his new grave, and longing, like Lettie, to see his face once more; but she leaned upon the strong arm which supported her, and a vague, unconscious comfort came to Rose's heart.

But Martha, whose fate it was to stand alone—to whom no one came to offer support—whose heart knew its own bitterness, and whose cares there was none to share or to lighten, held with both hands the back of a chair, and bent over it heavily with a stoop like the stoop of age. Lettie, standing near her, drew close to Martha with the same impulse which drew Cuthbert to Rose, and Lettie laid her head softly against her elder sister's arm. It moved the silent mourner into sudden irrestrainable tears, and she put out the arm which long exhaustion and straining had made almost rigid, and drew the child into her heart, pressing her there with a convulsive grasp. So were the sisters helped through this painful hour, each as suited her best.

When they were again seated, Martha spoke:

"My sister is ill—Mrs. Allenders—she cannot receive you, gentlemen, nor thank you. I thank you in her stead. I thank you for paying this respect—for doing all the honour that can be done now—I thank you—I thank you. Have I to do anything more?"

And Martha looked round for a moment vacantly; she was forgetting herself like one in a dream.

Then the lawyer rose and read the will. It bequeathed all the lands—everything to which Harry died possessed—to Martha Muir Allenders. There was nothing in it but the barest words, which made it a lawful document, and Harry's signature at the end.

A violent start came over Martha—a strange surprise upon the strangers present. "Poor little Mrs. Allenders!" they whispered to themselves, and wondered whether she would contest this will or no, or if it was worth her while, as they heard the land was greatly burdened. The only persons present who evinced no wonder, were Rose and little Lettie, to whom it seemed the most natural arrangement that Martha

should be their family head ; but Sir John Dunlop rose coldly to shake hands with Miss Allenders of Allenders. He had no sympathy with her now.

"Stay," said Martha, "stay, I beg ; there is something more to be said. Was he—he—able to execute this when he did it. Was his mind clear? Tell me—let me not say his name more than I must."

"Of sound mind," said the writer gravely, "with perfect knowledge of what he was doing—cooler than I am now ; he said he had broken your heart and lost your hopes—that he had nothing remaining but the land, and he would give it to you, to make a better use of it than he had done."

"He had remaining that was dearer than the land, and he bequeathed *them* to me," said Martha with difficulty. "If this land is mine now, bear me witness that it is only for the boy—only for little Harry, his heir, for Agnes and her other child. I take the trust since he gave it—but nothing is mine—I tell you nothing is mine. Mr. Charteris, I trust it to you, to see a deed made equal to this will securing the land to his lawful heir. Now, may we go away? I am faint and exhausted—I cannot speak ; but thank you—thank you. Our best thanks to you all—to all who have been here to-day—for the respect—for the honour."

And, as they came in, the three sisters left the room.

But the lawyer shook his head when Cuthbert asked him what he knew of Harry's affairs.

"Heavy debts, heavy debts," said Mr. Robertson—"I hear as much as five thousand pounds—and how can they ever pay that, off four hundred and fifty pounds a-year, which is all the estate yields. My opinion is, as a private friend, that they should sell the land. I cannot tell just now how much, but certainly it will require a heavy sum for a year or two to keep up the cultivation the way it has been begun. No doubt it will be very hard to give it up after such a capital is sunk in these fields ; but then, unless they have good friends to back them, how can they ever try to carry on with such a load? And I hear there's one thousand of the debt, at least, at extravagant interest. My opinion is, they should sell the land."

"I don't think they will ever consent to that," said Cuthbert.

"It's easy to see," said the writer earnestly ; "deduct two hundred and fifty for interest, it leaves them two hundred to live on—plenty, I confess, for a family of women, especially

when there is a person of resolution among them like Miss Allenders ; but if she should live a hundred years, she'll never be able pay a penny of the principal off that. You are a friend, Mr. Charteris—I think you should advise Miss Allenders to sell the land."

"She herself knows best. I will speak to her," said Cuthbert ; "it depends entirely on what she means to do."

A week after, they were able to lift Agnes from her bed to a fireside sofa. Her fever was gone ; but the sweet convalescence of an invalid surrounded by loves and cares, was sad and heavy to the young widow—for everything reminded her of Harry. She listened unawares to passing sounds without, and started and thought he was coming—fancied she heard his step on the stair, and the little cheerful stir with which he was wont to enter the outer room into which her own opened ; and then she wept—poor youthful broken heart!—but there was relief in those floods of tears.

They were all sitting round her—Martha close by her on the sofa, supporting and gently moving, when she wished it, her delicate feeble frame. And Rose held the baby up to her, while little Harry, wondering, and solemnly silent, stood by her, with his arm resting on her knee. Uncle Sandy, much shaken, and looking ten years older, stood behind at the window, trying, with much exertion, to compose himself, and speak to Agnes of the duty and necessity of resignation : but the good old man needed the exhortation as much as she did. Lettie, last of all, sat on a stool by the fire very silent, practising a stitch of "opening" which she had importuned Rose to teach her ; and Katie Calder, behind Lettie, looked over her shoulder, and learned the stitch too.

"What are we to do, Martha?" said Agnes feebly. Tell me, I will soon be well now—are we to go away?"

Martha laid her hand on little Harry's head, and drew him into the midst. The child stood gravely silent, looking up under her hand, with wondering eyes, and ruddy lips apart. Poor little Harry had cried a great deal through these seven days, for he could not understand why they led him after the coffin, and made him stand beside the grave. He cried then with dread and terror, but since then, many a time had Harry asked Mysie what had become of papa.

"This bairn must have the land, free as when we came," said Martha, calmly ; "and when the land is clear and re-

deemed, Agnes, he must have fair fame, and family credit, and good report, to add to his inheritance. I am left in trust to clear the land for its heir: we must stay in Allenders."

Agnes did not speak for a moment. She glanced round the room, first with a sick, despairing look, as if in fear of all its associations, then with tears and melting tenderness. The young mother put one feeble arm around her boy, and leaned her head upon Martha's shoulder, "I am very glad," she said, "very glad—we will have no other home."

This was all that was said to her in her weakness about the will, which might have added a concealed pang to Agnes's lawful grief—for now she too was jealous of Harry's love, and could not bear to think that any one had shared it with her, in anything near the same degree. Poor Harry! it was true that Martha and Uncle Sandy perceived the rash, unconsidering generosity, which set natural justice aside, to make this hasty will; but they said this to no one, nor to each other even; and in the hearts of all, Harry's sins were forgotten. He was already a saint canonized by sorrow and love.

"And Katie and me would like to do the opening," said Lettie in a half-whisper; "and Martha, Katie wants you to tell her that she's no to go back to Miss Jean."

"Oh, will you let me stay?" said little Katie, pathetically, "I'll never be ony trouble, and I could do the opening fine."

"The bairn's bread will never be missed," said Uncle Sandy, leaning upon the back of the sofa where Martha sat. "Ye must come with me, bairns, for a change, and stay a while in Ayr to rest your minds, poor things!—and Martha, my woman, you have mony a hard thing to do—you'll have to see Miss Jean."

"Ay, uncle," said Martha, "and I hear there is somebody in Edinburgh besides; it's only about money, Agnes: nothing to vex you, my poor bairn; and you must trust me with all. Will you go with my uncle, Agnes?"

"If *you* will, Martha," said the poor little invalid, holding by her indulgent nurse.

"I will come for a day," said Martha; "but now I must learn about business," she added, with a faltering smile, "and take order for many things. I cannot be long away from Allenders. Rose will go with you and the bairns. You have the bairns, Agnes, God be thanked! to comfort you."

And Rose, who had not spoken, again held up the baby, who stretched out his hand to pull his young mother's cap, and

crowed and laughed in her face, struggling to reach her arms with baby glee.

Poor little unconscious fatherless boy! Very strange looked this impulse of infant joy among all these sorrowful faces; and with a burst, which none could restrain, they all bowed down their heads and wept.

All of them, from the old man sobbing aloud behind the little couch, and Martha, no longer able to preserve her self-control, to little Harry, struggling stoutly as he looks upon them all, and breaking out in a loud shivering sob before the tears come; and it is some time before they can recover themselves—before the invalid is carried to her bed, and watched till she falls asleep, and they all disperse to do what they can, and conquer themselves. Martha and Uncle Sandy wait in the library for Charteris, who is to return to-day, bringing with him an account of poor Harry's debts—and their consultations are very grave; and you can fancy that on Martha's brow, care takes the place of sorrow—for no one knows the deep life grief, undisturbable and still, which lies at the bottom of her heart. Martha treats Agnes as if she were the principal sufferer; comforts Rose; soothes and consoles the very children, but does not say what she feels—that to all of them lie other interests, other hopes, and gladnesses within the world which they still are only entering—whereas herself sees nothing in the future but a monument of good fame, honour, and charity to be raised over Harry's grave. This is the end which, proud of him, and jealous for him still, she proposes to herself, caring little what obstacles lie in the way; and Uncle Sandy understands the wish, but doubts in his heart, in spite of all his faith in Martha, and cannot see how she is to accomplish it.

Meanwhile Agnes sleeps—forgets her griefs, and strengthens the feeble health which has worn to so delicate a thread; and Rose, sitting beside her, overcome by much watching, constant fatigue, and a sorrow no less present and engrossing than the young widow's, falls into quiet slumber too, and has a faint pensive smile under the tears, which still fall in her dream; and Violet and Katie sit on the carpet at the drawing-room window, with their heads close together, learning other stitches. Sometimes, indeed, Lettie pauses to cry bitterly, and Katie wipes eyes which stream in sympathy; but they are both much absorbed with this delicate craft, and are calculating how many "holes" they could do in a day, and

how they will be able to help Martha; so the children are comforted.

And deep exhaustion and quietness is upon Allenders. Idly in the faint sunshine, Dragon sits on his stair-head, and thinks with a faint wonder of his own recovery and Mr. Harry's death, and cannot apprehend that it is true, but listens still for his quick ringing footstep, and calls to John to inquire why Harry's horse is left continually grazing in the meadow park; and John in the kitchen speculates in a subdued and sober tone, upon the changes which may happen, and thinks he will speak to the minister about a new place in case of the worst. In Maidlin Cross there is much speculation too, and they wonder if the family will stay at Allenders, and whether they will sell the land: but nothing is known; and many an honest sigh for poor Allenders heaves from the broad breasts of his labouring men, and many a cottage mother lifts her apron mechanically to her eye, when she speaks of the "weel-spoken," kindly dead. Poor Harry! his whole world, gently and tenderly, let the veil of death fall over his evil deeds; remember only what he did well; and peace is upon his grave.

CHAPTER XLVII.

For mine inheritance I take this grave;
 Myself shall be its constant monument.
 I have spent all my tears. In other fashion
 Than with faint weepings must my dead be mourned
 For on this little sod I have beside
 A battle-ground. Think you the caitiff shame
 Shall share this consecrated spot with me?

OLD PLAY.

"THEY must not bid me; I cannot sell the land," said Martha, firmly.

Young Mr. Dunlop, deputed by his father to offer any "reasonable" assistance in arranging her affairs, or any quantity of advice reasonable or otherwise, sat opposite her in the library; Cuthbert Charteris waited rather impatiently. They had been engaged in an important consultation when Mr. Dunlop entered, and Cuthbert was turning over some papers restlessly, and looking round now and then, as if about to speak;

but young Mr. Dunlop still roused anything but peaceable feelings in Cuthbert's mind, and he remained silent.

"Of course, Miss Allenders, my father would never dream of forcing his advice upon you. All I have to say is, that in case you are disposed to sell the land, as we heard you were, Sir John would be glad to make you an offer for part of it—that is all."

"I am much obliged to Sir John Dunlop," said Martha, "but we have no intention—I cannot see we have any right—to dispose of any part of Allenders. Thanks, many thanks; but we must try to increase, not to alienate."

After some time, Mr. Dunlop went away. He did not understand the quiet gravity with which he was received, and carried home such an account of Martha's callousness, that his sister laughed scornfully, and said Miss Allenders had provided for herself, and would soon recover of her grief. Good Lady Dunlop only shook her head, and secretly resolved to call at Allenders, and see about this for herself; she could not believe that Harry's trusted sister was callous to his loss, when she herself, Lady Dunlop, who never had known death, except twenty years ago, when she lost a very little lisping child—a meeting with the adversary which she never could forget—always lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, and gave a sigh to poor Allenders when his name was mentioned. She could not believe in Martha's hardness of heart.

"It must be attended with very considerable expense," said Charteris. "You must either part with Allenders, or double its value—there is no alternative. And I do not see at present where this necessary seed of capital is to be procured. But we must try. You will come to Edinburgh then, on Monday, and see the creditor?"

"That is four thousand pounds, and Miss Jean one, and I have heard there were other bills," said Martha. "Yes, I will go on Monday. Can we pay all this, do you think, in one lifetime? And then there is the present money to be thought of; another thousand they say would do. We could manage to pay the interest of all that."

"But not to live besides," said Cuthbert, hastily.

Martha's head rose with a slight proud motion. "I have provided for that," she said, with haughtiness; but immediately softening, added so frankly that Cuthbert was touched almost to tears: "I mean we are all ready to work, and very willing. We are now as we were before we came to Allenders;

one is not—but what remains to do is for him; and we, all of us, sisters, and dearest to each other, are as we were.”

As she concluded, her tears fell silently upon the desk before her. “God is visiting my heart with the dews of youth,” said Martha, looking up with a sad smile of surprise. “I can cry now, whenever I would, like a bairn.”

And Cuthbert, who was a man, and a strong one, felt his heart swell; and with a strong impulse of help, bethought himself what he could do for those sisters, to aid them in their work.

“The houses at Maidlin must stand for a time,” said Martha. “You will think me weak, Mr. Charteris, but I cannot abandon even them; and we must try to find a place for John, and to sell the carriage and the horses. We will keep the gig which the old Laird of Allenders left, and Mysie—”

Martha stopped, with white lips and a strong shiver. She was about to say, that Mysie, like many other country girls, could drive; but just then there occurred to her the time when Mysie made trial of her skill, through the darkness of that Hallowe’en night, and for a moment she was silent.

“It will do for Agnes; all the rest of us are strong,” resumed Martha, with a voice that sounded harshly. “I think I can undertake that the house itself will cost the land nothing; and Armstrong is good and honest, and only wants some one to *bid* him do what he knows is necessary to be done; I can undertake that, too, I think. He was here yesterday. See what our calculations were, Mr. Charteris.”

Charteris took the paper and read. Though not in the ordinary business form, it was a statement of expenses for a year, including the interest to Miss Jean, and Harry’s other creditor. He asked to keep it, and she permitted him. Cuthbert began to be very sanguine; he thought he saw now where to find the money to complete poor Harry’s experiment with the land.

Then he rose to take his leave.

“Can you not stay to-night? They will be disappointed,” said Martha. “We have seen very little of you, Mr. Charteris, since—since we came here; but pray stay to-night, and cheer these poor girls. I am perhaps too much occupied for them, poor things! and they are going with my uncle to Ayr. Stay and see them to-night, or you will disappoint them.”

“Disappoint them? should I?” said Cuthbert, smiling faintly. “I stayed away because I thought myself very magnanimous and self-denying—perhaps it was only because my

pride was wounded ; but to disappoint them, or think I did, would be too great a pleasure—I must see them, to convince myself that I have not so much cause for pride.”

And Cuthbert, in a little flush of growing hope and gladness, looked up into Martha's face—Martha's face, calm and unchangeable, full of the great still sorrow, for which half an hour ago he had himself wept, struck him like an accusation. He cast down his eyes in silence, and stood before her almost like a culprit ; for the warm hopes and joys of the future looked selfish and small in the presence of this absorbed and quiet grief.

Just then Mysie entered, and gave Martha a letter. As she opened it, a piece of paper fell to the ground. Cuthbert lifted it up ; it was a note for fifty pounds.

Martha ran over the note quickly, yet with perfectly collected attention ; then, after a moment's hesitation, she handed it to Cuthbert, and sat down at her desk to write. The letter was from Gilbert Allenders.

“ Madam,

“ I borrowed at various times, little sums from your brother, the late Allenders—I cannot undertake to say what they came to exactly, but not above this I enclose. I am leaving Allender Mains next week, and would be glad to call, if there is no objection ; and would be glad to know whether I have your permission, as I believe I had the permission of your brother, to pay my addresses to your sister, Miss Rose. This is not a suitable time to ask, but I am anxious to know, and intend to settle down in Stirling ; and will be profited, I trust, by the late solemn warning, which, I assure you, has caused me the deepest regret.

“ With much sympathy, and compliments to all the family,

“ I remain, dear Madam, yours faithfully,

“ GILBERT ALLENDERS.”

Cuthbert unconsciously crushed the letter in his hand. Inconsiderable as his rival was, he was a rival still.

Martha's answer was very brief.

“ I return you, with thanks, the money you have sent me. We who remain have nothing to do with what passed between the dead and you. Let this be past, like everything else which put your names together. We are little disposed to

receive callers. Without any discourtesy, I think it is better that you should not come.

“MARTHA MUIR ALLENDERS.”

It was the first time she had signed her name so; and Martha placed the fifty-pound note within her letter, when she had shown it to Cuthbert, who looked on with some astonishment. Collected and self-possessed as she was, Martha could not, without strong emotion, either write or speak poor Harry's name, and her whole frame quivered with nervous excitement as she closed her letter. Cuthbert was much surprised; he thought this a piece of quite unnecessary generosity.

“Is it foolish?” said Martha, answering his look. “Well, be it so; but no one shall say that *he* gave this to a careless companion, and that it was exacted back again. I tell you, the meanest gift he ever gave, were it for his own destruction, is sacred to me—never to be reclaimed. It was his own. I will not hear a word of blame.”

And this irritation and defiance was the weakness of Martha's grief.

To subdue it, she rose abruptly, and went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where Agnes now sat by the fire, watching the wintry sunshine steal in at the window. Over the bright hair, which never before had been covered with a matron's hood, Agnes wore the close, sombre cap of a widow. They had tried to persuade her that this was unnecessary; but poor little invalid, heart-broken Agnes had a little petulance too, and insisted. Wrapped in a heavy black shawl, and with everything about her of the deepest mourning, her face, closely surrounded by those folds of muslin, looked very thin and pale; but the faint colour of reviving health began to rise in her cheek, and Agnes sometimes, in the impatience of early sorrow, wept that she could not die.

Uncle Sandy sat beside her, and a faint attempt at conversation had been going on; but it failed often, and had long breaks of listless silence; and Cuthbert fancied the patient, uncomplaining sorrow of the old man—the weakness which seemed to have fallen over him, the trembling hand, and husky voice, were almost the most moving of all.

Rose sat by the table, working; Lettie and Katie Calder were at the window; but you scarcely needed to look at their black dresses, to know that those strange words, “It is all over,” with their solemn mystery of significance, had been

lately spoken here. All was over—everything—life, death, anxiety, excitement. Their heads were dizzy, and their minds reeled under the recent blow; yet nothing was visible but languor, and a dim, exhausted calm.

And this evening passed, as every other evening seemed to pass, like some strange, vacant space, blank and still; yet Rose, when Cuthbert sat beside her, felt a grateful ease at her heart. It seemed as if some one had lifted from her, for a moment, her individual burden; and sad though the family was, and languid and melancholy the afflicted house, Cuthbert remembered this evening with a thrill of subdued and half-guilty delight, and again his heart longed, and his arms expanded, to carry away into the sunshine his drooping Rose.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Albeit I neither lend nor borrow;
Yet, to supply the ripe wants of a friend,
I'll break a custom.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

"ANOTHER day—I must give another day," said Cuthbert, as he hesitated between the Edinburgh and the Glasgow coach. "Nobody but I can do this business, and the business must be done, let my own do what it will—so now for Glasgow and my uncle."

And Cuthbert climbed to the top of the coach, and discovered that the winds between Stirling and Glasgow are very keen in November. He buttoned his coat tightly, and drew his plaid around him, with care and repeated exertions; but neither coat nor plaid, nor both together, made such an excellent defence against cold, as the glow at his heart.

The office of the Messrs. Buchanan is unchanged. It is true, one clerk has gone to Australia, and another to the West Indies—that one is in business for himself, and two are dead; but still Mr. Gilchrist's massive silver snuff-box glitters upon his desk, and still he contemplates its long inscription, and taps it lovingly, as he takes another pinch. Again, there is one clerk in the office who is a wit, and sings a good

song, and is "led away," and still Dick and Alick, and John Buchanan, are cool and business-like in the counting-house, and enjoy themselves boisterously out of it; though there are rumours that Dick is to be married, and "settle down."

The young Buchanans stare at Cuthbert's mourning—the crape on his hat, and his grave face—and wonder what far-away cousin must be dead, whom they have never heard of, and feel an involuntary guiltiness when they look upon their own coloured dress. Very far off and very poor must this cousin have been; they are all immediately prepared to defend themselves, and to exclaim that they got no intimation.

"What is this for, Cuthbert?" said Mr. Buchanan hastily, pointing to the hat in Cuthbert's hand.

"Do you remember Harry Muir, uncle?" said Cuthbert. "Poor Harry! those bits of crape are all that remain to him, of this world's friendship and honour."

Mr. Buchanan started, and was greatly shocked. "Poor fellow! I thought he was prospering now, and doing well—poor fellow! poor fellow! When did it happen, Cuthbert?"

"I heard the other day he had turned out very wild," said Alick Buchanan.

"He always was; there was no making anything of him in the office," added Dick, hastily.

Poor Harry! his old tempter and opponent felt a little twinge when he saw Cuthbert's mourning, and remembered him, without any particular satisfaction, of his own "joke," as he called it, about his cousin and his sister Clemie.

"Poor Harry! some of the best men in the county followed him to the grave," said Cuthbert, who understood very well the material he had to work upon, "and a universal regret went with him. Uncle, I have a little business to talk over with you, if you will permit me. Are you at leisure now?"

"What's going to happen, Cuthbert?" said Mr. Buchanan, smiling: "a bride coming home, eh? and what will your mother say to that? But come along, I'll go down with you—you shall have the benefit of my experience."

Mr. Buchanan's plain, unpretending, one-horse carriage waited for him in the street below. The young men, very independent and uncontrolled, came home in such manner as pleased them; but Cuthbert had to wait till the streets,

shining with lights, and loud with many voices, had faded into darkness behind them, and they were steadily proceeding over a quiet country road, before he could bring his business before his attentive uncle.

"I have very lately returned from the funeral of Harry Muir," said Cuthbert, whose face had been gradually becoming grave, and who had begun to grow anxiously impatient of their lighter conversation; "and just now, uncle, I come direct from his house, where his sister has been consulting me about her future arrangements. One cannot but be interested in this family—they clung to him with such devotion; and all they care for now, seems to be to maintain his good name, and clear his son's inheritance. Poor Harry! few men are loved so, uncle."

"He was a very unsteady lad, Cuthbert," said the merchant, shaking his head.

"It might be so," said Cuthbert. "I do not dispute that; but now he is dead; and I have set my heart on having help to Martha—I mean to his elder sister, who has charge of everything. She needs immediate assistance, uncle. I state my business, you see, very briefly; and now refuse if you will. I am not to be discouraged by any number of Nays."

"Assistance!" exclaimed Mr. Buchanan, hastily, fumbling in his breast-pocket for his purse, "do you mean to say they're so far reduced as that? No, no—no refusal, Cuthbert; I don't often shut my heart when there is real charity in the case."

"I know you don't, uncle, and this would be a great charity," said Cuthbert quick, feeling his face flush in the darkness; "but no alms—no alms. I will tell you the true state of the case now. The estate has had very little cultivation, and produces very indifferent crops. Poor Harry during the last year had begun to improve it, and expended a great deal of money on the land; but now he is dead, and the money spent, and a heavy debt upon the estate. They could pay the interest off their income, but could not touch the principal. Now, what are they to do, uncle?"

"Why, Cuthbert, a man of your sense! only one thing is possible—of course, sell the land."

"But Martha will never sell the land. Martha will labour at it with her own hands before she alienates the child's inheritance," said Cuthbert, getting excited. "I want money for her to carry on the works with; and this money she will

have, one way or the other, I know. My own scheme, uncle," added Cuthbert, with a short laugh, under which a great deal of anxiety was hidden, "is that you should give her a thousand pounds, and charge no interest for a year or two, till she gets everything in progress. I think this is the best possible solution of the problem, kindly and Christian-like—"

While Cuthbert spoke, Mr. Buchanan employed himself deliberately in buttoning his coat over the comfortable breast pocket, where his purse trembled with a presentiment.

"Thank you, Cuthbert," said the merchant drily, "I have no thousand pounds to throw away."

There was a pause; for Cuthbert, though not at all discouraged, needed to recover himself a little before he resumed the attack.

"The land could be sold to-morrow for ten thousand pounds, or more than that—I speak hastily," said Cuthbert. "It is burdened to the amount of five thousand, but after paying that, there remains abundance to satisfy your claim, and I can answer for the strictest honour in your debtor's dealing. Poor Harry! This Martha—this sister of his—clings to his every project. You could not see it without being deeply moved, uncle. She has a strong, ambitious, passionate mind, and his was a weak and yielding one; yet she clutches at every one of the rapidly-changing projects which he took up and threw down as toys of a day, and confers upon them a sort of everlastingness through the might of will and resolution with which she adopts them. Uncle, you must help Martha."

Mr. Buchanan sat by him in silence, and listened, hastily fastening and unfastening the one particular button which admitted his hand to his warm breast-pocket, competent and comfortable. The good man was naturally benevolent to a high degree—a propensity which Cuthbert, who was his uncle's favourite and chosen counsellor, encouraged by all means in his power; but the rules of business were at Mr. Buchanan's finger ends, and their restraint came upon him like a natural impulse, so that he actually did not know, good simple man, that his natural will was always towards the charity, and that this restraint was something artificial which interposed between him and his natural will.

"Perfectly unbusiness-like, Cuthbert," said the merchant. "I wonder greatly why you should speak of such a thing to me. A man accustomed to regular business transactions has no tolerance for such affairs as this—they are out of his way."

Your landed gentry or rich people, who don't know anything about where their money comes from, or how it is made—they are the people to carry such a story to."

Very true in the abstract, good Mr. Buchanan—nevertheless, your nephew Cuthbert knows, as well as if you had told him, that your purse begins to burn your breast-pocket, and leaps and struggles there, desiring to get the worst over, and be peacefully at rest again. Cuthbert knows it; and Cuthbert takes advantage of his knowledge.

"Martha is trustee, and has charge of all," said Cuthbert; "and there is little Mrs. Allenders herself, and her two babies. Little Harry, the heir, is a fine, bold, intelligent boy, young as he is, and will want no care they can give him—that is very sure. Then there are two other children quite dependent on Martha—her own little sister, and another, a distant relation, poor and fatherless, whom they have kept with them ever since they went to Allenders. Now there can be no doubt it would be easier for them to go away to some little, quiet, country house, and live on what they can earn themselves, and on the residue of what the land will bring; but Martha would break her heart. It is a generous devotion, uncle. She proposes to take the management of the farm herself, and has actually begun to make herself mistress of this knowledge, so strange for a woman; while the exertions of the others, and of her own spare hours, are to provide the household expenses, she calculates. All this is for Harry, and Harry's heir; and it is no burst of enthusiasm, but a steady, quiet, undemonstrative determination. Come, uncle, you will help Martha?"

"Is that the old sister—the passionate one?" asked Mr. Buchanan.

"The passionate one—yes."

"And there was surely one more that you have not mentioned; by the bye, Cuthbert," said Mr. Buchanan, hastily, "the boys used to say you went there often. There's nothing between you and any of them, I hope?"

"No, uncle!"—the humility of the answer struck Mr. Buchanan strangely. He almost thought for a moment that he had the little boy beside him, who used to spend holiday weeks in Glasgow, when Dick was a baby with streaming skirts, and "there was no word" of any of the others. It made the merchant's heart tender, even when he turned to look upon the strong man by his side.

But Cuthbert, for his part, thought himself guilty of dis-

ingenuousness, and by and bye, he added, "Don't let me deceive you, uncle. When I say no, I don't mean to imply that there will never be, nor that even if there never is anything between us, it will be any fault of mine."

But Mr. Buchanan only shook his head—how it came about, he could not tell, but the good man's eyelids were moistened, and there came back to him momentary glimpses of many an early scene; he was pleased, too, however imprudent Cuthbert's intentions might be, with the confidence he gave him—for that his nephew was more than his equal, the good merchant very well knew.

So Mr. Buchanan shook his head, and satisfied his conscience with the mute protest; "he could not find it in his heart," as he said to himself afterwards in self-justification, to condemn his nephew's true love.

"But this is not to the purpose," continued Cuthbert. "A thousand pounds, uncle, with the estate of Allenders, and myself for your securities. I am getting on myself—I shall soon have a tolerable business, I assure you, though this absence may put some of it in jeopardy. Give me my boon now, and let me hurry back to my office—a thousand pounds—and of course you will not accept any interest for a few years."

Mr. Buchanan sighed. "It is a very unbusiness-like transaction, Cuthbert," said the merchant.

"But not the first unbusiness-like transaction you have carried to a good end," said Cuthbert, warmly. "Take comfort, uncle; the Christian charity and the natural love, will hold out longer than business. And now you have given me your promise, I must say three words to my aunt and Clemie, and ask you to let Robert drive me back again. I must be home to-morrow morning at my work."

And travelling by night, in the disconsolate stage-coach was nothing like so satisfactory as an express-train—yet Cuthbert went home, very comfortably; and very comfortably did the slumber of an unencumbered mind, and a charitable heart, fall over Mr. Buchanan, though still he shook his head at his own weakness, and was slightly ashamed to make a memorandum of so unbusiness-like a concern.

CHAPTER XLIX.

"A bankrupt, a prodigal who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto; a beggar, that was used to come so smug on the mart. Let him look to his bond. He was wont to call me usurer: let him look to his bond. He was wont to lend money for a Christian charity; let him look to his bond."

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

A FEW days after this, Martha came to Edinburgh according to her appointment, to meet Harry's principal creditor, accompanied by Uncle Sandy, who, "with all the bairns," as he said, was to return home to Ayr whenever he was freed from his attendance on Martha.

The meeting was arranged to take place in Lindsay's office, and Martha carried with her the half-year's interest payable to this creditor. It was the last of his own four thousand pounds.

The man was a retired shop-keeper, eloquent on "the value of money," and thinking the five or six thousands which were the much-boasted result of his life, a great fortune, justly entitling its possessor to "a proper pride." Like most people, whose increase has been an accumulation of morsels, Mr. Macalister was terribly afraid of risk, and shrank from speculation with the most orthodox horror. Persuaded at first to invest his money in Harry's mortgage, because land was the most secure of banks, his ears had been keenly alive, ever since, to every morsel of news he could glean about Harry; and when Mr. Macalister heard he was *wild*, he trembled for his four thousand pounds. Then came Harry's death, and hearing that the property was left only in the hands of women, Mr. Macalister had a vague notion that he had power to sell the lands of Allenders, and pay himself, very probably making a profit of the transaction; or that he might, if he would, take possession, and become Laird of Allenders in his own person; but he had never mentioned this grand imagination to any one, though it invested him with a visionary importance, which surprised his very wife. Yet Macalister was by no means a dishonest man, nor one who would deliberately set about benefiting himself by cheating his neighbours—by no means; but his exaggerated idea of the money which he had laboriously earned, made him believe that all this was in his power.

So he came to Lindsay's office very spruce and shining, with an elaborate shirt-frill, and a new cane, determined to demand instant re-payment of the money, or failing that, to intimate his intention of entering upon possession of Allenders.

Lindsay, somewhat puzzled, was endeavouring to understand the solemn hints, and important allusions of Macalister, when Martha and her uncle entered his office. The creditor was somewhat taken by surprise; and when he saw the deference with which the lawyer received this grave-looking woman in her deep mourning, Macalister faltered; for he had never thought of "the other party"—never, except as natural opponents and adversaries of whom he, in this connexion of debtor and creditor, had greatly the advantage.

"I have been thinking—I'll likely want my money, Miss Allenders," said Macalister after a few general words had passed, followed by an embarrassed silence.

"Mr. Lindsay will pay you the interest which is due," said Martha; "and it would be a convenience to us if you did not—at least, immediately—claim your money. The works for which it was borrowed have not had time yet to be profitable; but a few years more, I trust—"

"Ay, Miss Allenders; but it's not so easy for me to wait a few years more," said Macalister, briskly, restored to his natural self-importance by Martha's request; "for ye see, I can show you plainly—"

But what Mr. Macalister could have shown plainly, remained for ever unknown to Martha; for at that moment a great commotion arose in the outer office, and the door of this room thrown violently open, disclosed the ghost-like face inflamed with fury, of Miss Jean Calder, who, holding Lindsay's clerk at arm's length, with her long fingers clutched upon his shoulder, had thrown the door open with her disengaged hand, and was about to enter the room.

Involuntarily, Alexander Muir drew back his chair, and Martha started. Like a visitant from the dead, the old woman, with a great stride, entered among them. Her tall, angular frame tottered, and her head shook, half with rage and excitement, half with the natural palsied motion of her extreme age. She was dressed in a large woollen shawl, once bright tartan, now as dim in its complexion as it was thin in its texture, and a large bonnet, standing out stiffly like a fan round her ghost face, which was encircled under it by a stiff ruff of yellow lace. Miss Jean made one great step forward,

and seizing upon Alexander Muir, shook him till herself was so thoroughly shaken that she scarcely could stand.

"Did I no tell ye—did I no warn ye, Sandy Muir, that I would pit my fit yet on his turf, that thought I was auld, and wished me dead, and had his covetous e'e on my siller? I'm saying did I no tell ye? And I'll tell ye what, strange folk," said Miss Jean, turning round with a glittering smile of malice, "I'm glad the reprobate's dead—that am I!—for now he'll keep nae honest body out of their ain."

Martha started from her seat with a violent passion—mingled of burning grief and fury—in her face. Her hand clenched, her form dilated—you would have thought her about to strike down at her feet the incarnate demon, whose laugh of shrill malicious triumph rang over Harry's grave; and, for an instant, a perfect tempest—an overwhelming storm, to whose rage everything would have been possible—possessed Martha, like another kindred demon. Then she suddenly sat down, and clasping her hands together, leaned them on her knee, drawing up her person, and stretching out her arms to their full length as if the pain were some relief to her; for years of endurance had not quenched the passionate, fiery nature out of Martha's soul.

"He's in the hands of God—he's entered the life where no man makes shipwreck!" said Uncle Sandy, rising up. "Bairns, have pity upon this miserable woman, who kens not the day that her soul may be required of her. Curse her not, Martha; curse her not. And woman, I say, blessed are the dead—blessed are the young graves—blessed is the very pestilence and sword, that preserves innocent bairns from living to be evened with the like of you!"

And, with a visible tremble of indignation shaking his whole frame, the old man sat down, unwitting that the curse he had forbidden Martha to speak, was implied in his own denunciation.

"Let them laugh that win," said Miss Jean; and the play's no played out yet, Sandy Muir. Where's my guid siller?—and where's a' the books and papers I furnished to yon lawyer chield, to make out your prodigal's claim? Weel, he's dead—he has nae claim noo—and I crave to ken wha's the heir?"

"His son," said Martha, distinctly.

"His son!—wha's his son? He was naething but a bit callant himself. Ay, Sandy, my man, ye thought little of my skill in folk's lives; ye thoct Jean Calder would have thrissels

growing ower her ain head, or ever there came a grey hair in Harry Muir's! What are ye saying till't noo, Sandy? No uncle to a laird noo—uncle to naething, but six feet of grass and a headstane! I saw him ance wi' his hair fleeing in the wind, and his laugh that ye could have heard it half a mile off, and me hirpling on my staff, wi' never ane looking over their shouther at me. I kent then in my heart, that auld as I was I would see him dead!—and it's true this day. Lad, may I sit down? I've come for my siller."

Lindsay put a chair towards her silently, and she half fell into it, half voluntarily seated herself. Poor respectable Macalister stood aghast, afraid of her wrinkled face, and the wild gleam in her frosty eyes. Martha, pressing her foot upon the ground, as if she crushed something under it, and clenching her hands together, till the pain of them mingled with the burning in her heart, bent down her head and kept silence; while Uncle Sandy, elevating himself with a simple indignant dignity, seemed about to speak several times, but for a sob which choked him, and which he would not have Miss Jean hear.

"I've come for my siller!" repeated Miss Jean, stamping her foot on the ground, to give her words emphasis. "What do ye ca' this woman? It's Martha, is't? Weel, there's little about *her* for onybody to envie, if it binna her bombazine. Ye would gie a hantle for the yard o' that now? I wonder ye had the heart—a' off the prodigal callant's estate, and cheating folk that he's awn lawful siller to. And it's no as if ye were a young lassie either, or ane to be set off wi' the like o' thae vanities. I wonder a woman come to your years doesna think shame?"

"Listen, Auntie Jean," said Martha, suddenly raising herself and speaking quick, as if to keep the resolution she had brought to this pitch: "There is nothing to be envied in me. I have neither youth, nor good looks, nor happiness—and never had! You may deal with me on equal terms: I am able to give you as much as you have hitherto got for this money of yours. I want it, and you want the income from it—give it to me if you choose: if you do not choose, withdraw it at once without another word. This is all I have to say to you. I will be glad if you take it away, and make me free of the connexion of your name; but I will change no arrangement willingly. Now, take your choice; and you, Sir, do the same. This is all I have to say."

And Martha turning her eyes from them, looked to Uncle

Sandy, who kept his fixed upon Miss Jean, and was still painfully composing himself to answer her.

"No," said the old woman with a malignant, feeble laugh, "there's naething to envie in you. I was a different looking woman to you in my young days, Martha Muir; but there was never a well-far'd bit about you a' your life, and a temper like the auld enemy. I wish you nae ill. I wadna gang out of my gate to do either gude or ill to the like of you, for I dinna think ye're worth my pains; but mony's the bonnie lad, and mony's the bonnie lass I've seen hame to the mools, that took their divert off me—and mony a ane I'll see yet, for a' that sneek-drawing hypocrite says."

"Ay," said Martha, "the comely, and the blythe, and the hopeful die away. The like of us that it would be a charity to take out of this world, live all our days, and come to grey hairs. Ay, auntie, the bairns are dying night and morning—the like of us lives on!"

"But bless the bairns, Martha—bless them whom the Master was at pains to bless," cried Uncle Sandy, his eyes shining through tears. "I am old, too, and have seen sorrow; but God preserve and bless the gladness of the bairns!"

"Ye're but a bairn yourself, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, casting upon him a half-angry, half-imbecile glance out of her wandering eyes; "and I've gien Mr. Macer a missive about your twa hunder pounds. What does the like o' you want wi' siller? and your grand house and garden, my bonnie man, and a' the young, light-headed gilpies ye train up to vanity? We'll just see how muckle the wives and weans will mind about you in Ayr, when ye're gaun frae door to door wi' a mealpock and a staff; but ye need never seek frae me."

The old man rose with some dignity: "Martha, my woman, this does not become you and me," said Uncle Sandy, "we that have grief and the hand of God upon us, are no more to suffer railing than to return it. These folk have heard what ye had to say, and you're no a person of two minds, or many words. Let us go back to our sorrowful house, and our bereaved bairns, with neither malice nor curse in our hearts, leaving the ill-will with them that it comes from. Ye can hear their answer, Martha, from the gentleman. Ye have said what ye had to say."

Almost mechanically Martha rose to obey him, and took the old man's arm. But after she had left her seat and taken a few steps towards the door, whither Uncle Sandy hastened

her with tremulous speed, she turned round—perhaps only to speak to Lindsay who followed them, perhaps to look again at the miserable old woman, who still was of her own blood, and had scarcely a nearer relative than herself in the whole world.

“I’ve come from Ayr on the tap o’ the coach, my lane,” said Miss Jean, suddenly relapsing, as she did sometimes, into the natural passive state of age, which forgot in an instant the emotions which had animated the poor exhausted skeleton frame. “If it hadna been a decent lad that paid the odds of the charge, and put me in the inside atween this and Falkirk, I’m sure I wad have been perished wi’ the cauld, and never ane of you offering a puir auld woman a morsel to keep her heart. I heard from Mr. Macer, in Stirling, there was to be a meeting here the day, and I thought my canniest plan was to take my fit in hand, and trust nane of thae sliddry writers. But, man, might ye no be mending the fire the time ye’re glowering at me? the tane’s as easy as the thither, and there’s as mony coals yonder standing in the scoop as would fill my bunker, and haud me gaun half the year. Coals maun be cheap here away, and I wadna scruple to make a bleeze, if you’re sure the lum’s clean; but I aye keep a frugal fire at hame: I’m a very careful woman. Sandy, do ye ken ony place hereawa where an auld body could get a sma’ cheap meal? I’m very moderate in my eating mysel, but travel appetizes even a frail person like me; and what was yon ye was saying about the siller?”

Lindsay repeated what Martha had said in a few words. Mr. Lindsay did not by any means admire this occupation of his office. But Miss Jean’s eyes wandered to Martha, who still stood silently looking on, and holding her uncle’s arm.

“She’s no muckle to look at,” said the old woman, bending her shrivelled face forward, “but Iv’e heard the voice she speaks wi’ afore, and it’s no like a fremd voice. Canna ye tell me what ye said about the siller yoursels, instead of standing there like a stane figure? and sit down and be quiet, honest man, now ye have gotten on the coals.”

This was addressed to Macalister, who very humbly, and with a look of fright at Lindsay, had replenished the fire at Miss Jean’s command. He now obeyed her again, with instant submission, feeling himself a very small person, and altogether forgetful of his imaginary grandeur.

Martha repeated her former words, where she stood, holding the arm of Uncle Sandy—and Uncle Sandy, still perceptibly trembling, averted his head with a simple pride and dig-

nity, and held Martha's arm closely in his own, as if with an impulse of protection.

"As lang as ye gie me fifty pounds by the year, ye can keep the siller till I hear of mair for it," said Miss Jean, at last; "but where ane favours ye, and does ye charity, ye might show a decent respect. Woman, there's the like o' you that never was weel-favoured nor yet young, nor had as guid a wit in your haill buik as I hae in my little finger; but ane bows to ye, and anither gies ye a haud o' their arm, and a' body civil, as if ye were something—when ye're naething but a single woman, without a penny in your purse, and needing to work for your bread day by day. But never ane, if it binna whiles a stranger, like him that put me in the inside of the coach, says a guid-e'en or a guid-day to me; and when I'm useless wi' my journey, it's no apples and flagons to keep my heart, but fechting and contentions that I never could bide—for a' body turns on me."

And the poor old woman mumbled and sobbed, and put up a great dingy handkerchief to her eyes.

Uncle Sandy's offence was gone—he could not see a semblance of distress without an effort to relieve it.

"I'll take ye in a coach to a decent place, Miss Jean," said Alexander Muir, "and bid them take care of ye, and see ye safe hame, and be at all the charges, if you'll just think upon your evil ways, and take tent to your ain life, and harm the young and the heedless nae mair."

"He thinks I'm a witch, the auld haverel," said Miss Jean, looking up with a harsh laugh; "but never you heed, Sandy, we'll gree; and ye can tell the folk to take me an inside place in the coach, and I'll take care mysel to see they settle for a' thing, and I'll gang away the morn; so ye can gie them the siller—or I'll take charge of it and pay them mysel—its a' the same to me."

CHAPTER L.

All men make faults, and even I in this ;
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are.

SHAKESPEARE.

AND Martha had to meet lesser creditors to whom Harry owed smaller amounts for trifles of his own wardrobe, of furniture, and other inconsiderable things. But the sum they came to altogether was far from inconsiderable. Uncle Sandy, who steadily attended and supported her, was grieved sometimes by the bitter and harsh passion with which she received the faintest word which implied blame of Harry. In every other particular Martha appeared a chastened and sober woman ; in this the fire and pride of her nature blazed with an unchecked fierceness which grieved the gentler spirit. Within himself there was something also which sprang up with instinctive haste to defend the memory of Harry ; but Martha's nervous impatience of the most remote implied blame, and the headlong fiery passion with which she threw herself upon any one who attempted this, made the old man uneasy. And people who encountered Martha's anger did not know its strange inconsistency, nor could have believed how well she was aware of Harry's faults, or how in her heart she condemned them ; but Martha had devoted her life to restore to Harry's memory the honour he had lost in his person, and whoso struck at him, struck at her very life.

They were walking home on their return—for the carriage was already sold—and John, who had not yet got another place, carried their little travelling-bags behind them. It was a bright November day, not very cold, but clear and beautiful, and the sunshine lay calmly like a glory on the head of Demeyet, crowning him against his will, though even he bore the honour more meekly than in the dazzling days of summer. The air was so clear, that you could see the white houses clustering at his feet, and hear the voices of distant farm-yards on every side, miles away, making a continual sound over the country, which seemed to lie in a silent trance of listening ; and from this little height which the road descends,

you can see the blue smoke of Allenders curling over the bare trees, and make out that the sunshine glances upon some bright childish heads under the stripped walnut on the lawn. Uncle Sandy, looking towards it, prays gentle prayers in his heart—prays to the God of the fatherless, the widow the distressed—to Him who blessed the children in His arms, and wept with the sisters of the dead; and has his good heart lightened and comforted, knowing who it is to whom he has in faith committed the charge of these helpless ones; and the old man has a smile upon his face, and many a word of tender kindness in his heart, to comfort the “bairns” at home—for they are all bairns to him.

But other thoughts burn at the heart of Martha, as she walks onward by his side. Unawares and unconsciously her soul shudders at the sunshine—hates with fierce impatience the voices and cheerful hum of ordinary life, which grow audible as they approach Maidlin, and shrinks from returning home—home, where that one vacant place and absent voice, makes her heart desolate for ever. Through her bitter repinings, Miss Jean’s exultation passes with a ghastly terror, and Martha shivers to think that this unholy age may come upon her, and has her heart full of questionings almost impious. That this old woman, envious, degraded and miserable, should be spared in the earth to see many a hopeful head laid low; that poor old Dragon, basking in the sunshine, should live on from day to day, and see the children die; that she herself should remain, and Harry be taken away. Martha said, “Why? why?” and groaned within herself, and was burdened, hating the very light, and shrinking with burning impatience from the respectful looks and half-spoken sympathies of these cottar women at Maidlin Cross. She could not accept sympathy; she turned away with loathing from all except those who immediately shared her sorrow; and even them she bore with sometimes painfully—for who could understand *her* grief?

A blasting fiery unblessed grief burning her heart like a tempest—and a sullen gloom came over Martha’s face as she averted her head, and walked on steadily, closing her ears to the pleasant natural sounds which seemed to crowd upon her with so much greater distinctness than usual, that they chafed her disturbed mind into very fury. “The Spirit of the Lord left Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him.” It was so with Martha now.

Little Mary Paxton has been learning to-day to make a curtsey—for she is to go to school for the first time to-morrow; and her big sister, Mysie, says the young ladies curtsey when they enter the school-room at Blaelodge. Mary has blue eyes, little ruddy lips, always parted by two small white teeth which appear between them; and cheeks, which the sun has ripened, according to his pleasure, all the summer through. In her little woollen frock and clean blue pinafore, Mary has been practising her new acquirement at the Cross. She is only four years old, and has a license which the elder children have not; so little Mary rises up from the step of the Cross on which she has just seated herself for a rest, and coming forward with her small steps, pauses suddenly on the road before Martha, folds her little bare hands on her breast, and looking up with the sweet frank childish face, and the two small teeth fully revealed by her smile of innocent satisfaction, makes her little curtsey to the lady, and stands still to be approved with the confidence of her guileless years.

Upon Martha's oppressed heart this falls like a blow under which she staggers, scarcely knowing for the moment from whence the shock comes. Suddenly standing still, and grasping at the old man's arm to support herself, she looks at the child—the child who lifts up her sweet little simple face, with its smiling parted lips and sunny eyes, and look of perfect trust and innocence. Little Mary wits not that there are in the world such despairs and bitternesses as blind the very heart in Martha's breast; and Martha's breast heaves with a great sob as this sudden stroke falls upon her. The old woman's haggard face, with its ghostly triumph, disappears from her mind—herself, heavy with the grief, which is greater than every other, passes away from her relieved sight. Standing still in perfect silence, a sudden burst of natural emotion which sweeps away all evil things before it, falls upon her as from the skies—a strong revulsion, like the witched mariner.

“O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare.
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware:
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unaware.”

The tears came in floods irrestrainable to Martha's eyes, and with another long sob, she snatched up the child in her

arms, kissed its little innocent, surprised face, and covering her own with her veil, hurried away. But she had blessed them unaware—blessed all God's creatures out of a full heart, acquiescing in that mysterious love which apportions all things; and the natural sounds and sights were gall to her no longer, and the burden fell from her neck. All the way home she hid her tears, and restrained the sound of her weeping so far as possible; but Uncle Sandy saw and wondered, that Martha was indeed weeping like a child.

Two days after, Uncle Sandy with his family went to Ayr. They were to stay a month, Martha said, and Agnes and Rose acquiesced very quietly. What did it matter where these pensive, sorrowful days were spent? But Agnes went away, occupied with many little necessary cares for her own delicate health, and for the children, who now had no maid to attend them; and Rose, charged with the care of all the little party, had countless small solitudes and responsibilities to interest her, and could even sometimes escape with a sigh into her own dream-country, and be charmed into a grateful repose; while Lettie and Katie Calder, could scarcely repress a certain childish excitement in prospect of the journey, and were in their full enthusiasm about new stitches, and the work they were to do in Ayr to help Martha. All had some such new-awakened interest to relieve the strain of constant grief, as human creatures mercifully find when God lays upon them the heaviest of His chastisements. But they went away, and left Martha with her one maid Mysie, and the poor old Dragon, in a house peopled with continual reminders of Harry—alone.

And as she lay upon her bed awake, through these gloomy, solitary nights, and dreamed of footsteps on the stair, and mysterious sighings through her silent room, the strong heart of Martha trembled. What if the spirit hovering by her, struggled in those inarticulate breathings to communicate something to the dull human sense, which cannot hear the delicate voices out of the unseen country? What if Harry—the true Harry—not him they laid under the sod in the churchyard of Maidlin—was straining his grander spiritual faculties by her side, to attain to the old mortal voice which only she could hear, and tell her what mercy God had communicated to his soul, and where its dwelling was? And Martha held her breath and listened, and with a throb of deeper grief was sensible of this thrill of fear which reminded her how great a

gulf and separation lay now between her and the dead—a gulf before which the human spirit fainted, refusing to front the forbidden mystery which yet its restless, curious thoughts assail on every side. But in the broad daylight many a time there seemed to Martha an eye upon her which benumbed her like a spell—a conscious presence going with her as she went and came, sitting silent by her side, fixing upon her constantly this fascinating eye.

Meanwhile everything extraneous was cleared away from their now simple and plain establishment. John was gone—and Mr. Buchanan's money, lodged in the Stirling Bank, restored credit and respectability to the steady and continuous care which began to rule over Harry's fields. At Martha's years there is difficulty in learning an altogether new occupation, and this was of itself distasteful and *outré* to a woman; but sometimes, though every one respected her presence, it happened that she heard indifferent people speak of "poor Allenders," of the "warning" of his death as Gilbert called it, or of the shipwreck of his life. And this, which brought the burning blood to Martha's face, inspired her with power to overcome every obstacle. Harry—who in her heart needed no name—he had been too long the acknowledged centre there—it was to Martha the bitterest pain to speak of him to the uninterested and careless, who, presuming on her mention of him, plied her with allusions to her brother, till her impatient sorrow could have turned upon them, and struck them down even with a blow. But even this Martha schooled herself to bear—schooled herself to tell the men with whom her necessary business brought her into contact, that this was Harry's will and that his intention; that he had proposed this work, and that charity, which she was bound to carry out, and would. Gradually these people came to look upon him with a visionary reverence—this spirit of the dead whose intentions lived in a will so strong and unvarying; and his own weakness passed away, and was forgotten, in the strength which placed itself, like a monument, upon his grave.

CHAPTER LI.

Here is no change but such as comes in me.
OLD PLAY.

MAGGIE MCGILLIVRAY clips no longer in the wintry sunshine at her mother's door. Poor little foolish girl, she has married a cotton-spinner, and at eighteen has a baby, and many cares upon the head which used to stoop under the light as she sang the "Lea Rig," and clipped at her web. And Bessie McGillivray, who has succeeded Maggie, has no such heart for either the work or the song, but drawls out the one dismally, and idles about the other, and thinks it would be a great relief to marry a cotton-spinner too, and have no more webs to clip—a fate which she will accomplish one of these days. And Bessie is "cauldrife," as her mother says, and prefers sitting at the fireside to-day, though the sunshine comes down mellow and warm through the November fog; so that the scene from Mrs. Rodger's parlour window loses one of its most pleasant features, when there is nothing to look to opposite, but the idle light lying on the stones at Peter McGillivray's door.

Mrs. McGarvie's Tiger, still tawny and truculent, winks in the sun, as he sits upon the pavement, confronting it with his fierce red eyes. But Mrs. McGarvie's red-haired Rob has gone to Port Philip to make his fortune in the bush, and pretty little Helen has undergone the universal destiny, and is married. There is change everywhere without—new names on the Port Dundas Road—new houses springing up about its adjacent streets; but Mrs. Rodger's parlour, where Agnes and Rose, and Uncle Sandy, with the children, are now assembled, though a long succession of tenants have passed through it since they left it, remains still the same.

And still the same is gaunt Mrs. Rodger in her widow's cap—genteel and grim, terrible to tax-gatherers, and innocent men of gas and water; and Miss Rodger, care-worn, faded and proud; and the prim Miss Jeanie. But "Johnnie," in his chimney corner, has begun to be moved to better things than this perpetual idleness; and though he has not reached so far as to overcome himself, and his false and unwholesome shame, he is approaching to this better state; and a great

clumsy good-natured lodger pays persevering court to Miss Aggie. The hoyden is decidedly reluctant, and resists and rejects him stoutly—but it is no use, for this is her fate.

And Agnes with the bright hair all hidden under her widow's cap, sits down by the window with her baby in her lap, and bending over it, attending to its wants, lets her tears fall silently upon its frock, and on the little round arms which stretch up to her, till a violent paroxysm comes upon her, and she has to leave the infant to Rose, and steal away into the inner room "to compose herself," as she says—in reality to sob and weep her strength away, and be exhausted into composure. Poor little unconscious child, upon whom this heavy baptism falls! for now, one by one, over the little hands with which he strokes her cheek, steal the tears of Rose. It was unwise of them to come here; the place is too full of memories.

By a way which Violet has often clambered up in the summer nights long ago, it is possible to reach the high field which, closely bordering upon Mrs. Rodger's house, is level with the bed-room windows. Here in the dusk, when the night cold has scarcely set in, and one star trembles in the misty sky, strays Lettie's friend, Mr. John, pondering over many things; and here comes little thoughtful Lettie, to search the old corners, where she used to find them, for one remaining gowan, and keep it as a memorial of this place which is like home. From the edge of the field you can look sheer down upon the road with its din and constant population, and upon the lights gleaming scantily in those little nooks of streets about the Cowcaddens, where Violet knows every shop. From the other end of the field, close upon the dangerous brink where it makes abrupt and precipitous descent into a great quarry, comes the sound of those distinct measured strokes, broken by continual exclamations and laughter, with which two stout servants beat a carpet. The dust is out of it long ago, but still their rods resound in quick time on either side, and their voices chime in unison; and now they trail it over the dark fragrant grass, and stealing to the edge call to the passengers below, who start and look around in amazement, and would not discover whence the voice comes, but for the following laugh, which reveals the secret. And by and by a "lad" or two, and some passing mill girls, scramble up the broken ascent which communicates with the road; and often will the mistress look from her door in dismay, and

the master call from the window, before Janet and Betsy lift their carpet from the grass, and recollect that it is "a' the hours of the night," and that there are a hundred things to do when they return.

But Lettie puts her hand softly into Mr. John's hand, and begins to answer, with many tears, his questions about Harry; and tells him how Martha is to do everything that Harry wanted to be done, and that they are all to work at the "opening," and Katie Calder is to stay at Allenders; but neither of them are to go to school at Blaelodge any more. Violet does not quite know what makes her so confidential, and has a compunction even while she speaks, and thinks Martha would not be pleased—but yet she speaks on.

"And we're all to be busy and work at the opening; for Martha says we need not think shame," said Lettie; "and Katie and me will be able to help to keep the house, Mr. John; and Rose says it's better to work than be idle, and it keeps away ill thoughts; but I like best to think it's lane, without working, or to read books—only I've read all the books in Allenders, and I'm no to be idle any more."

"You see I'm aye idle yet, Lettie," said John.

"Oh yes; but then you never need—and you've aye been," said Lettie, hastily; for to Lettie Mr. John was an institution, and his idleness was part of himself—a thing quite beyond discussion, and unchangeable.

But a burning flush came over John Rodger's face, in the darkness, and Lettie saw instinctively that his feelings were wounded. This brought upon her a strange embarrassment; and while anxiously casting about for something to say, which should change this painful subject, she fell into a shy silence—which was only broken at last by Mr. John himself.

"No, Lettie, I have not been always idle, and I *have* need," said the roused man; "and when I hear a little thing like you speaking about work, and helping to keep a house, it makes me think shame of myself, Lettie. You and your sisters, that might be so different, working for your bread—and me this way!"

"Ay, but Miss Jeanie and Miss Aggie work more than we do," said Lettie, simply.

For always it is the angel from heaven, miraculous and strange, and not the daily revelations of Moses and the prophets, which these bewitched natures think will rouse them. Miss Jeanie and Miss Aggie, with all their little vanities, had

hearts sincere on this point, and full of gracious, unconscious humility. *They* never reminded the idler that they worked for him; never thought that they were pinched and restrained, in the ostentations they held so dear, because "Johnnie" hung a burden on their hands; never speculated, indeed, on the question at all, nor dreamed of giving reasons to themselves for the spontaneous natural impulse, which made this self-sacrifice unawares. And he himself never realized it either; but he was struck with the devotion of Martha and her household. This, unusual, strange—a thing he did not see every day—moved him; the other had scarcely occurred to him when Lettie spoke.

They left Glasgow the next day; for neither Agnes nor Rose could bear to remain in the house, so familiar to them of old; and they did not return to Mrs. Rodger's on their way home; but when Miss Aggie married the lumbering lodger, and came to be settled on the other side of the Firth, at Alloa, and received her sister as a visitor, Miss Jeanie made a pilgrimage to Allenders, and told them, with tears in her eyes, that Johnnie, now a clerk with a Port Dundas merchant, had said to her, that *she* should never want while he had anything, and had given her money to buy the expensive unsuitable upper garment she wore. Poor Miss Jeanie, with her vanities and simplicities, never discovered that he owed *her* gratitude; but for these words of kindness she was tearfully grateful to him.

The month at Ayr passed very quietly. In this winter weather Uncle Sandy's little company of workers could no longer visit the leafless garden; and though there was sometimes a great fire made in the kitchen, and a special lamp lighted for them, yet their own fireside, the old man thought, was the most suitable place for them now. So the family were almost perfectly alone; left to compose themselves into those quiet days which were but the beginning of a subdued and chastened life. And Uncle Sandy did for them now what Martha was wont to do through the terrible time which preceded Harry's death. He read to them sometimes;—sometimes he was himself their book and reader; and from his long experience, the young hearts, fainting under this great sorrow, learned how many trials life can live through, and were unwillingly persuaded that the present affliction would not kill them, as they sometimes hoped it might; but must lighten, perhaps must pass away. But they clung the closer to their

sorrow, and defied the very chance of returning gladness ; and Agnes cut away the curls of her bright hair, and said she would wear this widow's cap her whole life through ; and Rose grew sick at sounds of laughter, and believed she would never smile again.

CHAPTER LII.

A gloomy piece this morning with it brings ;
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.

ROMEO AND JULIET.

It was December, cold and dreary, when the family returned to Allenders. Their very return was a renewal of the first sorrow to both themselves and Martha. They came, and Harry was not there to welcome them ; they had never before felt so bitterly his absent place ; they came, but Harry came not with them—and Martha's very voice of welcome was choked with her anguish for the dead.

There had been much discussion with Uncle Sandy, whom they were all anxious to induce to return to Allenders, and remain with them there. The old man did not consent. Reluctant as he was to be separated from them now, his own old house and neighbourhood were parts of his gentle nature. He could not leave them—could not relinquish his universal charge of the “bairns,” nor deprive his young embroiderers of the air and sunshine, to which no one else might think of admitting them. So Uncle Sandy brought his charge to Glasgow, and bade them an affectionate farewell, promising a yearly visit to Allenders ; but he could not give up his little solitary home.

They settled immediately into the monotonous and still order of their future life. Martha's room, where there were few things to suggest painful remembrances, they made a little work-room ; and here Agnes and Rose sat by the window at their work, and Lettie and her little companion learned their lessons, and laboured with varying industry—now enthusiastic—now slack and languid, at the “opening,” in which they were soon skilled. And Martha, returning wearied from business out of doors, or in the library, came up here to take off her outer wrappings, and begin the other labour

which called for her. And Lettie on the carpet, and Katie on her little stool, kept up a running conversation, which sometimes gave a passing moment of amusement to the sadder elder hearts; and little Harry played joyously, beguiling his sad young mother into momentary smiles; and the baby began to totter on his little feet, and make daring journeys from the arms of Martha into his mother's; and gradually there grew to be a certain pensive pleasure in their evening walk, and they roused themselves to open the window, when the little Leith steamer shot past under the trees; and every day filled itself with its own world of duty, and passed on—slowly it is true—but less drearily than at the first.

No one grudged now, nor mixed ill-feeling in the emulation with which neighbouring agriculturists watched the fields of Allenders. Something of fear and solemn awe startled the very labourers in these fields when Martha passed them, assiduous and diligent in all the work she set herself to do. They were not afraid of *her*—she did not impress them with more than the respect which they gave willingly as her right; but there was something solemn in a representative of the dead—a person living, as it seemed, but to carry out the thoughts and wishes of another who had passed away. The stir and thrill of renewed and increased industry came again upon Maidlin Cross. It was true they had no model cottages yet, but the land lay marked out on the other side of the cross, where Harry's new houses were to be: and Armstrong thought Miss Allenders had answered him almost fiercely, when he proposed to plough this land, and enclose it in a neighbouring field. No,—it was Harry's will those houses should be built, and built they must be, when justice and right permitted; and it soon came to be known in Maidlin, where Harry in his careless good-humour had promised anything without bestowing it, that it needed but a hint of this to Martha to secure the favour. And the work went on steadily and prosperously, and with a wise boldness Martha drew upon Mr. Buchanan's thousand pounds. Armstrong, no longer driven to the sad alternative of doing nothing, or acting upon his own responsibility, became emboldened, and was no longer afraid to be now and then responsible; and Allender Mains became a great farm-stead, and began to send off droves to Stirling market, and Falkirk tryste, and was managed as the cautious Armstrong never could have managed it, had all this gainful risk and expenditure been incurred for himself.

And on the Sabbath days when they leave the church—Agnes in her widow's weeds leaning on Martha's arm, and Rose leading the children—they turn aside to a little space railed off from the wall, where moulders the mossed gravestone of the old Laird of Allenders, and where the gowans and forget-me-nots grow sweetly under the spring sunshine upon Harry's breast. His name is on a tablet of white marble on the wall—his name and age—nothing more. They go there silently—almost as it seems involuntarily—towards their grave, and stand in silence by the railing, visiting the dead, but saying nothing to each other; and after a little while, as silently as they came, the family go away. Nor do they ever allude to this visit, though the custom is never broken through—it is something sacred, a family solemnity, a thing to be done in silence.

And the ladies of Nettlehaugh and Foggo do not disdain now to call on Mrs. and Miss Allenders, nor even Miss Dunlop, though she stands upon her dignity, and has heard a secret whisper that these hands she condescends to shake, work at her collars and handkerchiefs, and earn bread by their labour. But at the end of the dining-room beside Cuthbert's window, some preparations were begun long ago for the erection of that conservatory which Miss Dunlop recommended to Harry—and to her mother's consternation, Miss Dunlop makes the cool inquiries about it, and presumes they do not intend to carry it out now. Martha answers with a blank gravity which she has learned to assume, to cover the pang with which she mentions his name, that other more important wishes of Harry's have to be carried out before she can come to this; but that what he intended shall be done without fail, and that it only waits a suitable time. "They say that Heaven loves those that die young," says Martha, with a grave simplicity, "yet the dead who die in their youth leave many a hope and project unfulfilled—and few have been so full of projects, and had so little time to work them out."

This is all—but Miss Dunlop, bewildered and conscience-stricken, dares scarcely speak again of the fickle weakness of poor Allenders, and all his vain, magnificent aspirations, and efforts to be great. She has a vague impression that she has blundered in her hasty estimate of poor Harry, and that it was indeed because his sun went down at noon, that none of his great intentions ripened into success—for no one ventures to prophesy failure to Harry's purposes now.

And Cuthbert comes when he can spare a day—comes to bring them news of the far-away world whose vexed and troubled murmurs they never hear, and to receive with affectionate sympathy, all they tell him of their own plans and exertions. Cuthbert is admitted to the work-room, and takes out Agnes and Rose to their nightly walk, upon which Martha, who, herself actively employed, has no need of this, insists; and Agnes leans upon him as on a good and gentle brother, and there comes a strange ease and repose to Rose's heart as she walks shyly by his side in the twilight, saying little, but preserving with a singular tenacity of recollection everything the others say. And Rose, waking sometimes now to her old personal grief—a thing which seems dead, distant and selfish, under the shadow of this present sorrow—recollects that Martha's "capital" is from Mr. Buchanan—that Cuthbert is his favourite nephew, and that there may be truth yet in the story which fell like a stone upon her heart. But Rose only speculates unawares upon these individual anxieties—they seem to her guilty, and she is ashamed to harbour them—yet still unconsciously she looks for Cuthbert's coming, and when he comes grows abstracted and silent, and looks like a shy, incompetent girl, instead of the fair, sweet-hearted woman into whose fuller form and maturity her youth developes day by day. Yet Cuthbert's eyes are witched and charmed, and he has strangely correct understanding of every shy, half-broken word she says; and Rose would start, and wonder, and scarcely believe, in her timid unconscious humility, could she see how these broken words remain in Cuthbert's heart.

CHAPTER LIII.

I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward.

KING LEAR.

"I WAS born this day fourscore and five years ago," said Dragon. "It's a great age, bairns, and what few folk live to see; and for every appearance that's visible to me, I may live ither ten, Missie, and never ane be a prin the waur. I would like grand mysel to make out the hunder years, and it would be

a credit to the place, and to a' belonging till't; and naeboddy wishes ill to me nor envies me for my lang life. Just you look at that arm, Missie; it's a strong arm for a man o' eighty-five."

And Dragon stretched out his long thin arm, and snapt the curved brown fingers—poor old Dragon! Not a child in Maidlin Cross but could have overcome the decayed power which once had knit those loose joints, and made them a strong man's arm; but Dragon waved it in the air exultingly, and was proud of his age and strength, and repeated again with earnestness: "But I would like grand to make out the hunder year."

Lettie, now a tall girl of fifteen, stood by Dragon's stair, arranging flowers, a great number of which lay before her on one of the steps. They were all wild flowers, of faint soft colour and sweet odours, and Lettie was blending hawthorn and primroses, violets and cowslips, with green sprigs of the sweetbriar, and here and there an early half-opened wild rose—blending them with the greatest care and devotion; while Katie Calder, developed into a stout little comely woman-like figure, stood by, looking on with half-contempt; for Katie already had made a superb bouquet of garden flowers, and was carrying it reverentially in her apron.

"It's five years this day since Mr. Hairy came first to Allenders," continued the old man, "and it's mair than three since they laid him in his grave. The like o' him—a young lad! and just to look at the like o' me!"

"But it was God's pleasure, Dragon," said Lettie, pausing in her occupation, while the shadow which stole over her face bore witness that Harry's memory had not passed away even from her girl's heart.

"Ay, Missie," said the old man, vacantly; "do ye think the spirit gaed willingly away? I've thought upon that mony a time when I was able to daunder up bye to the road, and see the farm; and it's my belief that Mr. Hairy will never get right rest till a's done of the guid he wanted to do, and a's undone o' the ill he did—that's my belief. I think myself he canna get lying quiet in his grave for minding of the work he left to do; and if there was ane here skilled to discern spirits, he might be kent in the fields. What makes the lady sae constant at it, think ye, night and morning, putting to her ain hand to make the issue speedier, if it's no that she kens about him that's aye waiting, waiting, and never can enter into his rest?"

Lettie let her flowers fall, and looked away with a mysterious glance into the dark shade of the trees; and the vague awe of poetic superstition was strong upon Lettie still.

"Dragon," she said, in a very low voice, "I used to think I heard Harry speak, crying on me, and his footstep in his own room, and on the stair; and all the rest thought that too, for I have seen them start and listen many a time, thinking it was Harry. Do ye think it could be true? Do ye think, Dragon, it could be Harry? for I came to think it was just because he was aye in our mind that we fancied every sound was him."

"Ane can never answer for the dead," said the poor old Dragon. "Ane kens when a living person speaks, for ye can aye pit out your hand and touch them, and see that they're by your side; but I pit out my hand here, Missie—it's a' clear air to me—but for aught I ken, an angel in white raiment may be standing on my stair-head, and anither within my door, laying a mark in the Book, yonder, that I may open it the night at ae special verse, and read that and nae ither. How is the like o' me to ken? And you'll no tell me that Mr. Hairy winna stand by the bride the morn, and be the first to wish her joy, though we may ne'er hear what he says."

With a slight tremble, Violet, putting away her flowers, leaned upon the step, and looked again into the darkening shadow of the trees; and Lettie tried to think, and to pray in her simplicity that her eyes might be opened to discern the spirits, and that she might see Harry, if he were here. But again the mortal shrank from the visible immortality, and Lettie covered her eyes with a thrill of visionary fear.

"Dragon, look at Lettie's flowers," said Katie Calder; "she wants to put them on the table, where the minister's to stand, instead of all the grand ones out of Lady Dunlop's; and I never saw such grand flowers as Lady Dunlop's, Dragon."

"The dew never falls on *them*," said Lettie, starting to return to her occupation; "and if you were in the room in the dark, you would never know they were there; but I gathered this by the Lady's Well, and this was growing at the foot of the stone where Lady Violet sat, and the brier and the hawthorn out of that grand hedge, Dragon, where *a'* the flowers are; and if I put them on the table in the dark, the wee fairy that Dragon kens, will tell the whole house they're there; but Lady Dunlop's have no breath—and mine are far liker Rose."

As Lettie speaks, some one puts a hand over her shoulder, and lifting her flowers, raises them up very close to a glowing radiant face; and Dragon, hastily getting up from the easy-chair on his stair-head, jerks his dangling right arm upward towards the brim of the low rusty old hat, which he wears always. It is only persons of great distinction whom Dragon so far honours, and Dragon has forgotten "yon birkie," in his excited glee about the approaching wedding, and his respect for the "groom."

"Very right, Lettie," said the bridegroom, with a little laugh which has a tremble in it; "they are far liker Rose. And will you be able to come to the gate to-morrow, Dragon, and see me carry the flower of Allenders away?"

"But ye see, my man," said Dragon, eagerly, shuffling about his little platform, as he looked down on Cuthbert, "I never had her about me or among my hands, when she was a little bairn; and if it was either Missie there, or the ither ane, I would have a greater miss; for I've gotten into a way o' telling them stories, and gieing a word of advice to the bit things, and training them the way they should go; so they're turned just like bairns o' my ain. But I wish Miss Rose and you muckle joy, and increase and prosperity, and that ye may learn godly behaviour, and be douce heads of a family; and that's the warst wish that's in my head, though you *are* taking ane of the family away, and I never was married mysel."

And Cuthbert, responding with another joyous laugh, shook hands with Dragon, after a manner somewhat exhausting to the loose arm, of whose strength the old man had boasted, and immediately went away to the waterside, to take a meditative walk along its banks, and smile at himself for his own exuberant boyish joy. Serious and solemn had been many of the past occasions on which he had visited Allenders; and now, as the fulfilment of all his old anticipations approached so certainly, so close at hand, Cuthbert's moved heart turned to Harry—poor Harry! whose very name had a charm in it of mournful devotion and love!

The sun shone in next morning gaily to the rooms of Allenders, now suddenly awakened as out of a three years' sleep; and Agnes curls her bright hair, and lets the sunshine glow upon it as she winds it round her fingers, and with a sigh, lays away the widow's cap, which would not be suitable, she thinks, on Rose's wedding-day; but the sigh is a long-drawn breath of relief—and with an innocent satisfaction, Agnes, blooming

and youthful still, sees her pretty curls fall again upon her cheek, and puts on her new white gown. It is a pleasant sensation, and her heart rises unawares, though this other sigh parts her lips. Poor Harry! his little wife will think of him to-day.

Think and weep, but only with a serene and gentle melancholy; for the young joyous nature has long been rising; and Agnes, though she never can forget, laments no longer with the reality of present grief. It is no longer present—it is past, and only exists in remembrance; and Agnes is involuntarily glad, and will wear her widow's cap no more.

And Martha is dressing little Harry, who will not be quiet in her hands for two minutes at a time, but dances about with a perpetual elasticity, which much retards his toilet. There are smiles on Martha's face—grave, quiet smiles—for she too has been thinking, with a few tears this morning, that Harry will be at the bride's side, to join in the blessing with which she sends her other child away.

And Rose, in her own chamber, in a misty and bewildered confusion, seeing nothing distinctly either before or behind her, turns back at last to that one solemn fact which never changes, and remembers Harry—remembers Harry, and weeps, out of a free heart which carries no burden into the unknown future, some sweet pensive tears for him and for the home she is to leave to-day; and so sits down in her bewilderment to wait for Martha's summons, calling her to meet the great hour whose shadow lies between her and the skies.

And Lettie's flowers are on the table, breathing sweet, hopeful odours over the bridegroom and the bride. And Lettie, absorbed and silent, listens with a beating heart for some sign that Harry is here, and starts with a thrill of recognition when her heart imagines a passing sigh. Poor Harry! if he is not permitted to stand unseen among them, and witness this solemnity, he is present in their hearts.

CHAPTER LIV.

"Behold I see the haven now at hand
To which I mean my wearie course to bend.
Vere the maine shete, and bear up with the land,
The which afar is fairly to be kend,
And seemeth safe from storms that may offend.
FAERY QUEEN.

AGNES, with her relieved and lightened spirits, goes cheerfully about her domestic business now, and has learned to drive the little old gig, and sometimes ventures as far as Stirling to make a purchase, and begins to grow a little less afraid of spending money. For some time now, Agnes has given up the "opening"—given it up at Martha's special desire, and with very little reluctance, and no one does "opening" now at Allenders, except sometimes Martha herself, in her own room, when she is alone. These three years have paid Miss Jean's thousand pounds, and one of Macalister's four, and Mr. Macalister is very happy to leave the rest with Miss Allenders, who, when her fourth harvest comes, has promised to herself to pay Mr. Buchanan. For assiduous work, and Martha's almost stern economy, have done wonders in these years; and the bold Armstrong boasts of his crops, and his cattle now, and is sometimes almost inclined to weep with Alexander, that there is no more unfruitful land to subjugate and reclaim.

But before her fourth harvest time, Martha has intimated to Sir John Dunlop's factor that it was her brother's intention to make an offer for the little farm of Oatlands, now again tenantless, and Armstrong does not long weep over his fully attained success; though Oatlands has little reformation to do, compared with Allender Mains. And Harry's model houses are rising at Maidlin Cross; sagacious people shake their heads, and say Miss Allenders is going too far, and is not prudent. She is not prudent, it is very true—she ventures to the very edge and utmost extent of lawful limits—but she has never ventured beyond that yet, nor ever failed.

And Harry's name and remembrance lives—strangely exists and acts in the country in which Harry himself was little more than a subject for gossip. To hear him spoken of now, you would rather think of some mysterious unseen per-

son, carrying on a great work by means of agents, that his chosen privacy and retirement may be kept sacred, than of one dead to all the business and labour of this world; and there is a certain mystery and awe about the very house where Harry's intentions reign supreme, to be considered before everything else. So strong is this feeling, that sometimes an ignorant mind conceives the idea that he lives there yet in perpetual secrecy, and by-and-bye will re-appear to reap the fruit of all these labours; and Geordie Paxton shakes his head solemnly, and tells his neighbours what the "auld man" says—that Allenders cannot rest in his grave till this work he began be accomplished; and people speak of Harry as an active, existing spirit—never as the dead.

It is more than a year now since Rose's marriage, and not far from five since Harry's death, and there is a full family circle round the drawing-room fireside, where Mrs. Charteris has been administering a lively little sermon to Lettie about the extravagance of destroying certain strips of French cambric ("It would have cost five-and-twenty shillings a yard in my young days," says the old lady), with which Lettie has been devising some piece of ornamental work for the adornment of Agnes. But Lettie's execution never comes up to her ideal, and the cambric is destroyed for ever; though Katie Calder, looking on, has made one or two suggestions which might have saved it.

"For you see, my dear, this is *waste*," said Mrs. Charteris; "and ye should have tried it on paper first, before you touched the cambric."

"So I did," said Lettie, nervously; "but it went all wrong."

And Rose smiles at the childish answer; and Mrs. Charteris bids Violet sit erect, and keep up her head. Agnes is preparing tea at the table. Martha, with little Sandy kneeling on the rug before her, playing with a box of toys which he places in her lap, sits quietly without her work, in honour of the family party; and Uncle Sandy is telling Katie Calder all kinds of news about her companions in Ayr.

Why is Lettie nervous? Cuthbert at the table is looking over a new magazine, which has just been brought in from Stirling with a supply of other books ordered by their good brother; and constant longing glances to this magazine have had some share in the destruction of Lettie's cambric. But

Lettie is sixteen now, and Agnes thinks she should not be such a child.

"Here is something for you," says Cuthbert, suddenly. "Listen, we have got a poet among us. I will read you the ballad of the 'Lady's Well.'"

"She sat in her window like a dream,
She moved not eye nor hand;
Her heart was blind to the white moonbeam,
And she saw not the early morning gleam
Over the dewy land;
Nor wist she of aught but a tale of wrong,
That rang in her ears the dim day long.

"Her hair was like gold upon her head,
But the snow has fallen there;
And the blush of life from her face has fled,
And her heart is dumb, and tranced, and dead,
Yet wanders everywhere—
Like a ghost through the restless night,
Wanders on in its own despoight.

"But hither there comes a long-drawn sigh—
A thrill to her form, a light to her eye:
Only a sigh on the wind, I wiss;
Keep us and guard us from sounds like this!
For she knew in the breath, for a mystic token,
The words of the rede, by that graybeard spoken.

"The bridal robes are glistening fair
In the gray eventide,
Her veil upon her golden hair,
And so goes forth the bride—
Who went before to guide astray
All wayfarers from this way;
Whose the voice that led her hence,
How that graybeard came, and whence;
Known were these to her alone,
And she told the tale to none.

"The fountain springs out of the earth,
Nor tells what there it sees;
And the wind with a cry, 'twixt grief and mirth,
Alights among the trees.
She sat her down upon the stone,
Her white robes trailed o'er the cold green turf,
Her foot pressed on the dreary earth,
Alone, alone, alone.
Not an ear to hear, not a voice to tell,
How the lady passed from the Lady's Well.

"The lady sat by the Lady's Well,
 When the night fell dark and gray;
 But the morning sun shone in the dell,
 And she had passed away.
 And no man knew on the coming morrow
 Aught but the tale of an unknown sorrow;
 And nought but the fountain's silver sound,
 And the green leaves closing in around,
 And a great silence night and day,
 Mourned for her vanishing away.

"But peace to thee, Ladie, lost and gone!
 And calm be thy mystic rest.
 Whether thou dwellest here unknown,
 Or liest with many a kindred one,
 In the great mother's breast;
 The woe of thy curse has come and fled,
 Peace and sweet honour to our dead!"

But Lettie, growing red and pale, dropping the paper pattern which Mrs. Charteris has cut for her, and casting sidelong, furtive glances round upon them all from under her drooped eyelids, trembles nervously, and can scarcely keep her seat. When Cuthbert comes to the end there is a momentary silence, and Martha looks with wonder on her little sister; and Agnes exclaims in praise of the ballad, and wonders who can possibly know the story so well. Then follows a very free discussion on the subject, and some criticism from Cuthbert; and then Martha suddenly asks: "It is your story, Lettie, and you don't often show so little interest. How do you like it? Tell us?"

"I—I canna tell," said Lettie, letting all her bits of cambric fall, and drooping her face, and returning unconsciously to her childish tongue; "for—it was me that wrote it, Martha."

And Lettie slid down off her chair to the carpet, and concealed the coming tears, and the agitated troubled pleasure, which did not quite realize yet whether this was pain or joy, on Martha's knee.

Poor Lettie! many an hour has she dreamed by the Lady's Well—dreamed out grand histories for "us all," or grander still

"———" "Resolved
 To frame she knows not what excelling thing
 And win she knows not what sublime reward
 Of praise and honour——"

But just now the sudden exultation bewilders Lettie ; and there is nothing she is so much inclined to do as to run away to her room in the dark, and cry. It would be a great relief.

But the confession falls like lightning upon all the rest. Cuthbert, with a burning face, thinks his own criticism the most stupid in the world. Rose laughs aloud, with a pleasure which finds no other expression so suitable. Agnes, quite startled and astonished, can do nothing but look at the bowed head, which just now she too had reproved for stooping. And Mrs. Charteris holds up her hands in astonishment, and Katie clasps hers, and says that she kent all the time. But Martha, with a great flush upon her face, holds Lettie's wet cheeks in her hands, and bends down over her, but never says a word. Children's unpremeditated acts, simple words and things have startled Martha more than once of late, as if a deeper insight had come to her ; and now there is a great motion in the heart which has passed through tempests innumerable, and Martha cannot speak for the thick-coming thoughts which crowd upon her mind.

That night, standing on the turret, Martha looks out upon the lands of Allenders—the lands which her own labour has cleared of every overpowering burden, and which the same vigorous and unwearied faculties shall clear yet of every encumbrance, if it please God. The moonlight glimmers over the slumbering village of Maidlin—over the pretty houses of poor Harry's impatient fancy, where Harry's labourers now dwell peacefully, and know that their improved condition was the will and purpose of the kindly-remembered dead. And the little spire of Maidlin Church shoots up into the sky, guarding the rest of him, whose memory no man dares malign—whose name has come to honour and sweet fame, since it shone upon that tablet in the wall—and not one wish or passing project of whose mind, which ever gained expression in words, remains without fulfilment, or without endeavour and settled purpose to fulfil. And Martha's thoughts turn back—back to her own ambitious youth and its bitter disappointment—back to the beautiful dawn of Harry's life—to its blight and to its end. And this grand resurrection of her buried hopes brings tears to Martha's eyes, and humility to her full and swelling heart. God, whose good pleasure it once was to put the bar of utter powerlessness upon her ambition, has at last given her to look upon the work of her hands—God, who did not hear, according to her dimmed apprehension, those terrible prayers for Harry

which once wrung her very heart, gave her to see him pass away with peace and hope at the end, and has permitted her—her, so greedy of good fame and honour—to clear and redress his sullied name. And now has been bestowed on Martha this child—this child, before whom lies a gentle glory, sweet to win—a gracious, womanly, beautiful triumph, almost worthy of an angel—and the angels know the dumb, unspeakable humility of thanksgiving which swells in Martha's heart.

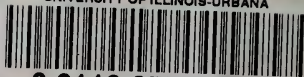
So to all despairs, agonies, bitternesses, of the strong heart which once stormed through them all, but which God has chastened, exercised, at length blessed, comes this end. Harvest and seedtime in one combination—hopes realized, and hopes to come; and all her children under this quiet roof, sleeping the sleep of calm, untroubled rest—all giving thanks evening and morning for fair days sent to them out of the heavens, and sorrow charmed into sweet repose, and danger kept away. But though Martha's eyes are blind with tears, and her heart calls upon Harry, Harry—safe in the strong hand of the Father, where temptation and sorrow can reach him no more—the same heart rises up in the great strength of joy and faith, and blesses God, who knoweth the beginning from the end—who maketh His highway through the flood and the flame—His highway still, terrible though it be—who conducts into the pleasant places, and refreshes the failing heart with hope; and the sleep which He gives to His beloved, fell sweet and deep that night upon the wearied heart of Martha Muir.

THE END.





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